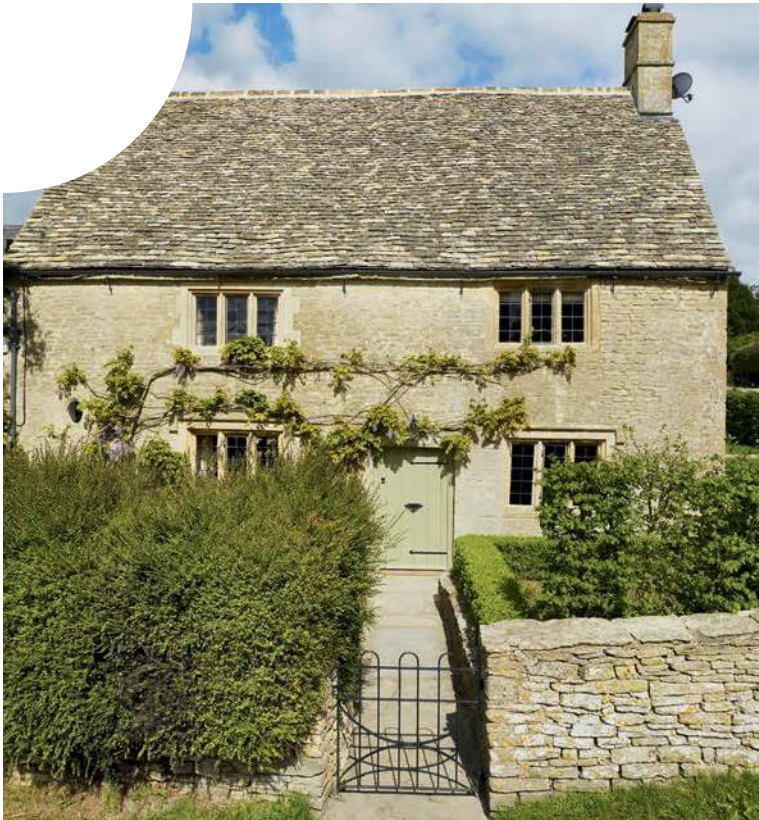


PERIOD LIVING Country Homes & Gardens

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Welcome

In *Period Living Country Homes & Gardens*, we showcase some of the most beautiful rural period properties in the UK and Ireland, along with an inspiring selection of garden case studies and advice features, to help you capture country style whether your home is in a bucolic setting or not.

At its heart, country home style is simple and unpretentious, which makes it such an enduring look that translates from the grandest of manor houses to the humblest of cottages. To recreate the look, the secret is eclecticism – so mix antiques, vintage and salvaged treasures with well-crafted new pieces to give the look of a home that has evolved through time.

No country-style home is complete without a colourful, fragrant garden. As well as a visual guide, this book contains essential advice features on creating a cottage scheme, a rose garden and a kitchen garden, tackling practical matters such as soil type and orientation, to the fun task of choosing the plants.

So, whether you are planning a large-scale renovation, a single-room decorating project, a garden makeover, or simply love country style, immerse yourself in this definitive collection, where you'll find all the inspiration you need.

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BUILT IN A DAY

Chris and Alison Young fell in love with a quintessential English thatched cottage and have slowly uncovered its hidden secrets

Words and styling Pippa Blenkinsop | Photographs Jody Stewart

The kitchen was formerly a barn, which was converted and linked to the living space in the 1950s. Chris and Alison reconfigured the room and brightened the highly varnished pine cabinets with a lick of paint – for similar shades, try Farrow & Ball's Pointing and Old White. The splashbacks were retiled and they fitted new worktops made from salvaged tables, some of which came from their daughter's house complete with graffiti by their grandchildren. For similar floral fabrics, try Peony & Sage





W

e're never living in a period property,' said Chris Young to his wife Alison, after helping to renovate their daughter's 16th-century home.

But when it came to relocating from Cornwall to Wiltshire to be closer to family in 2010, Chris and Alison were charmed by the original features of a 1700s chocolate box thatch, which they have since discovered has far more to it than meets the eye.

Set in a quiet village behind a picket fence and enveloped by garden, the cottage is at its best on a glorious summer's day; its front borders brimming with a mix of rose bushes, petunia-filled hanging baskets, fuchsias and hollyhocks bobbing in the breeze. Inside, the house has all the ingredients of a rural English cottage: low ceilings with rustic beams, a deep inglenook and flagstone floors, bound with a timeless country charm.

It's hard to imagine that this cottage originally consisted of just two rooms, an upstairs and a downstairs, cobbled together within a day. 'We commissioned a historical survey and it found that the cottage had been built using squatter's rights under Common Law in the 1700s, which declared that if a house could be built within 24 hours, with smoke coming from its chimney, then the builder could claim the land as his own,' explains Chris. 'It was a hurriedly constructed timber-frame building with wattle and daub walls – luckily these features are still intact today, so it's a rare gem.'

The survey also revealed details of the cottage's piecemeal evolution, including a wing added in the 1800s and the conversion of an adjoining barn into a kitchen in the 1950s. Unlike previous generations, Chris and Alison were determined to limit structural changes to essential maintenance, seeing themselves as custodians tasked with preserving the property's pretty period features.



Instead the pair have made their mark by refreshing the tired interior and transforming it into a homely, welcoming space, in-keeping with the age of the property. Fascinated by pieces from the past, and keen archaeologists, Chris and Alison enjoy wandering antiques shops and fleamarkets for vintage finds to bring their home to life. 'We try to only buy things that have a purpose,' says Alison. 'We want it to look lived in, not like a museum, but sometimes it's hard to resist. We're running out of space, so Chris has set a rule that we can only buy something if it fits in my handbag!'

The pair have also focused their efforts on turning the uninspiring outdoor space into a pretty garden befitting the charm of the house. Step outside and you notice the garden is a continuation of the living space, cleverly zoned by strategically placed plants, fencing and furniture into a series of outdoor rooms. Everywhere you look quirky planters and garden antiques are dotted to create humour and interest. 'We can't imagine living anywhere else – it's perfect. Except we're even starting to run out of space in the garden now!' 

THE STORY

Owners Chris and Alison Young, both retired, live here and are often visited by their children and grandchildren

Property A two-bedroom thatched cottage originally built around 1725 with later additions, set in a small Wiltshire village

What they did The couple updated the kitchen, added a new bathroom and made essential structural repairs. They have decorated throughout





Opposite: The dining room occupies a later addition to the property. In summer Chris and Alison love to have the doors open to enjoy the garden, which is an extension of their cottage
This page: On the opposite side of the dining room is a vintage daybed, perfect for admiring views of the garden. Beside it is a table upcycled from a Singer sewing machine stand







Opposite: The bureau in the hallway is from Bressington's antiques shop in Devizes
This page: Decorated in a timeless country style, the living room occupies the oldest part of the house, which once formed the single downstairs room of the squatters' cottage. To complement the low ceiling, Chris and Alison opted for a short, Howard-style sofa from Sofas & Stuff. For similar rose cushions, try Kate Forman



Above left: The couple exposed a section of the original wattle and daub walls to reveal a sense of the house's history

Above: A traditional kitchen dresser is filled with pretty floral china and old jam jars collected from various fleamarkets and antiques shops

Left: Chris' silver collection is beautifully displayed in the hallway – it started with a vesta case belonging to his grandfather;

Opposite: Chris and Alison carpeted the living room to keep the space cosy, but in the hall they chose to leave a section uncarpeted to reveal part of an original brick floor. The inglenook originally housed the old range, which was removed in the 1950s





Above: In the master bedroom an exposed beam partway through the wall indicates the original roof line of the cottage before it was raised and new windows were installed by later generations. Chris and Alison opted for a simple but feminine scheme. The bed is from Dunelm and Alison upcycled the lampshades using pretty floral ribbon

Right: Low ceilings and narrow access meant that it was tricky to accommodate big pieces of furniture, so Chris and Alison extended an existing wardrobe and picked up a selection of old leather luggage cases from fleamarkets, which can be easily stored above the wardrobe and under the bed

Left: In the guest room, floral quilts and cushions from Shepton Mallet fleamarket give a traditional English cottage feel

Above left: At the opposite end of the guest room is a pretty dressing table; for a similar rustic ladder, try Maisons du Monde





Modern cabinets from Howdens and granite worktops from D&G Stone Services contrast with the old beams and flagstones

RESTORATION DRAMA

It took a cast of skilled craftspeople to mend the broken backbone of Peta and Ivo Clifton's medieval hall, which was crumbling under layers of adaptations

Words Karen Darlow | Photographs Jody Stewart | Styling Anna Morley



S

tarlings, squirrels, rats and monks are just some of the former inhabitants of Peta Clifton and husband Ivo's Grade II*-listed home. In its heyday, the medieval hall house would also have sheltered servants, farm labourers and their beasts in the open central hall, while the lord of the manor and his family slept in separate quarters on the upper floor.

When Peta and Ivo took on the house back in 2011, reuniting it with the 1,200 acres of land around it that they already farmed, its fascinating history was masked by a Victorian façade. With the building in need of urgent repair, the couple's plan was to restore it to prevent further decay, but they had no inkling of what that would entail. 'It looked more like a dilapidated Victorian rectory from the outside, but it was built around 1300 and had belonged to a monastery,' says Peta. 'When the monastery was dissolved it was given to the farm. It's very unusual for a domestic building of this age to have survived.'

It had only just survived, though, and the centuries had left their marks on the house, as Peta explains: 'The Elizabethans put in the mammoth chimney in the kitchen and all the wide oak floors. The Georgians did their bit, too, but it's what can only be described as agricultural Georgian, not smart Georgian. Then the Victorians gave it a façade and raised the roof level – clever engineering, but not what we'd consider good conservation now. Finally, a lot of work was done in the 1980s, which really caused a lot of trouble.'

Peta and Ivo wanted to strip away some of the more heavy-handed modifications and offer their modern interpretation of medieval open-plan living. 'We couldn't take it back to the original floorplan, because it would have been exposed right up to the roof,' says Peta. 'We decided to recreate the Elizabethan layout, which opened up the spaces and is how people want to live these days. Instead of lots of small rooms, we've created a much more 21st-century design.'

While the couple knew what they hoped to achieve, it took nine months of discussions with English Heritage, the planners, the builders, and even an architectural archaeologist, to get the permissions in place before work could begin. At the same time, Peta turned detective as she unravelled the layers of alterations to the house, working to reassure English Heritage that the plans for the restoration were exactly that: repairs, not further assaults on this historic building.

Once the plans were agreed, they engaged a firm of builders from nearby Ludlow. 'They were called Treasures & Son and really lived up to their name,' says Peta. 'They are specialists in listed buildings and were truly magnificent. It's not about the lowest cost when you're looking for a builder for a project like this, but value for money.'

Structurally, the state of the hall took everyone by surprise, even the master craftspeople builders. Numerous partition walls had misguidedly been used to isolate the damp sections of the house, but these had in effect stopped the building breathing, exacerbating its problems. 'There were areas where the plaster was removed from a section of the medieval timber frame and the air getting into it meant it just crumbled away – you just picked it up and it was gone,' recalls Peta.

So, alongside all the obvious repairs – reroofing, rewiring and replumbing – there were unexpected but equally essential repairs emerging almost daily. Peta carefully monitored the progress as 35 builders worked around one another every day for a period of eight months.

Metal Crittall windows had been fitted in the 1950s and were incongruous with the Victorian façade. However, as Peta explains: 'Because the house has had so many evolutions, deciding what to take as a reference point for something so important as windows was very difficult.'

In the end it took some careful sleuthing from Peta to track down the 90-year-old man who had owned the hall in the 1950s. His photo album showed the original leaded windows, and English Heritage approved Peta's design for 48 replacement windows, based on the old photos and including a detail from one of the main cruck beams. 'Outside we've used a different detail to match the Victorian façade, while for the Georgian section it's a simpler design,' she explains.

Apart from the windows, the other hot topic for discussion with English Heritage was the cruck beams, which date back to 1300. 'The Georgians had cut right through one of them to put in a staircase,' says Peta. 'It was cultural vandalism.' The couple removed the staircase and a joiner

worked for three weeks to repair the missing base of the cruck beam. 'There's even a special reserve of old oak that Treasures & Son keeps for important projects such as this,' says Peta. 'English Heritage has a strategy that says you should be able to "read the repair", so it's obvious where a repair has been made.' Now the work is finished, the difference in the colours of the oak is obvious, but the repairs are all the more beautiful for being so honest.

A similar harmony of old and new guides Peta's furnishing choices for the house. In the kitchen, modern units, appliances and chairs rub shoulders with a table crafted from old floorboards, with the Elizabethan flagstones underfoot. It is Peta's favourite room and the vintage blue glass carboys, storage jars for oil or beer, are her ultimate accessory, catching the light through the window.

Peta admits she has 'a terrible auction habit', and sourced beds, tables and chairs from local salerooms. Curtain fabrics and cushions are striking but not overpowering, and the overall impression is of eclectic yet companionable styles.

This is true in the living room, where a modern corner sofa, antique trunk and hatboxes create a relaxed look; equally in the solar bedroom, where once the lord of the manor would have slept with his family around him. Lampshades from Ikea, an antique bed, and an en suite tucked under the eaves, all bear out Peta's theory that 21st-century living and Elizabethan details are the perfect mix. And when the builders removed the later plasterboard, they found medieval decorative paintwork on the cruck beams. 'It's lovely, so of course we kept it,' says Peta. 'We were also able to prove there was originally a door in here, so we could put it back in to make an en suite.'

Similarly, in one of the bathrooms there was proof that the Victorians had changed the roofline. Sections of the wind brace had been cut away to install a window, although remarkably the builders found missing pieces in the woodshed and were able to reposition them where they would have been originally. As a result of these alterations, Peta and Ivo were given permission to add another window to match on the opposite side of the room.

'It's important to look at the evidence and get these things right,' says Peta, 'because you have an obligation to cultural history, but also from a purely practical point of view. The new window has made this whole room so much lighter.'

It could almost be her mantra for the whole of this magnificent 21st-century Elizabethan mash-up, which is light and practical, but with a deep sense of responsibility to the property's history. 🏡

THE STORY

Owners Peta and Ivo Clifton, who farm the land around the house. They have three young sons, Harry, Edward and Alex, as well as a dog called Tati

Property A Grade II*-listed medieval hall house on the Herefordshire/Worcestershire border. It has a Victorian façade and a Georgian oast house section

What they did Peta and Ivo pared away some of the heavy-handed modifications to the house and have opened up the space again to give a modern take on medieval open-plan living. They also reroofed, replumbed (there were three hot water systems in the house) and rewired throughout







Opposite: Peta's favourite room, the kitchen-diner has a pared-back rustic style. So many visitors have admired the vintage carboys on the windowsill that Peta sells them on her homeware website, Hyde Inside. The table, paired with chairs from John Lewis, is made from old floorboards; pendant lights by Skinflint hang above, alongside original Elizabethan meat hooks

Above: The living room has a relaxed look, with cushions and curtains from St Jude's Fabrics and a log-burner from Clearview Stoves. The walls are painted in Little Greene's White Lead Mid

Left: The boot room – essential for life on a working farm

In the solar bedroom, lampshades from Ikea are a near-perfect match for the crewelwork curtain fabric Peta found on a trip to India six years ago; an en suite is tucked under the medieval cruck beam





Carrie and Michael with their beloved vintage car – it was one of the main reasons for moving as they needed a safe place to store it



VINTAGE CHARM

Carrie and Michael Page have brought out the period character in their compact rural home with confidence, and finished it with unique finds

Words Naomi Jones | Photographs Brent Darby



They were lucky to inherit a handmade kitchen. This will be the last room to be tackled – Carrie and Michael plan to change the layout

THE STORY

Owners Carrie Page works for the National Trust and her husband Michael is a furniture maker

Property Wisteria Cottage, in Northumberland, was built in 1840 as a grain store and converted into a home in the early 1900s. It has two bedrooms

What they did The house was structurally sound, so the couple have carried out mainly cosmetic repairs, including replastering, redecorating and refitting the bathroom

In just three years, Carrie and Michael Page have transformed a dated two bedroom cottage into a warm and welcoming home with a vintage twist. Wisteria Cottage is a delightful home situated next to a picturesque village green in the Tyne Valley, Northumberland. Built in 1840 as a grain store for the local brewery, it was converted in the early 1900s into a characterful house with wonky floors, uneven walls and wonderful exposed beams.

Carrie explains: 'Since we moved in, we have very carefully enhanced and restored the cottage to make it into an idyllic English country home. Michael and I are big fans of 1940s style – we even got dressed up for our wedding at the Pickering Wartime Weekend – so we've tried to incorporate that into the cottage, too.'

'Previously, we lived across the valley, about a mile away,' she continues, 'on a busy road with a shared garage; we've got a vintage car as well as our "runarounds" so we wanted to be away from the road and have plenty of safe parking space. We started looking on the internet and saw this house, but it had an asking price of £225,000; we simply couldn't afford that.'

'A few months later we fell in love with another house that was about 20 miles away. We made an offer on that and put ours up for sale. Then, when ours sold within the week and we still hadn't had our offer accepted, we knew that we had to start to investigate other options.'

'Wisteria Cottage was still on the market so we arranged a viewing with the idea that we could put in a cheeky offer. We loved it but as it was smaller than what we were looking for, we offered £210,000 – so were amazed when the vendors accepted! The buying process moved really quickly and we were in within a few weeks.'

While the cottage was structurally sound, Michael and Carrie have carried out extensive cosmetic repairs. Michael says: 'The walls were bumpy with gravel or sand mixed into the plaster. With the help of a professional, I've skimmed the walls; it's really helped bring more light in, because the texture had been creating shadows.'

'The beams were all covered with brown paint,' he continues, 'if they'd been left natural that would have been great, but to keep costs down we painted them white rather than strip them; the ceilings are quite low downstairs so the white has made the beams feel less imposing.'

'Under the stairs was a bookcase,' adds Carrie, 'which wasn't useful, and there was no place to put our vacuum cleaner. Michael turned the space into a utility cupboard and has covered it in tongue-and-groove panelling, so now we can make the most of every inch of space.'

She continues: 'The bathroom was one of the worst rooms: all the pipes were on show and it had a dated bath; so we stripped all that out and hid the pipes underneath the floorboards. We've added a high level cistern to the original toilet and made the sink from various reclaimed bits, like the taps which we had made longer to fit. The bath, meanwhile, was salvaged from a friend's house. Michael rang me up to say, "Ian's throwing out his roll-top bath, do you want it?"'

'Very excited, I said, "Yes!" We had the bath re-enamelled and painted it to match the walls; it looks marvellous.' New chequerboard flooring, more tongue-and-groove, and a period-style radiator all add to the shabby chic feel.

The rest of the work on the cottage has been mostly decorative. The interior, once magnolia throughout, has been refreshed with traditional furnishings, floral fabrics, and antique pine furniture from local auctions; wall coverings and paints are from William Morris, Laura Ashley and Farrow & Ball. Carrie explains: 'We love visiting historic houses and living museums, so we decided to replicate styles and ideas we've seen, such as ledged and braced doors, and old framed postcards and prints on the walls.'

Outside, meanwhile, the couple have been busy, having painted the windows and doors to blend seamlessly with the sandstone walls, and have covered the pathways with slate to co-ordinate with the roof.

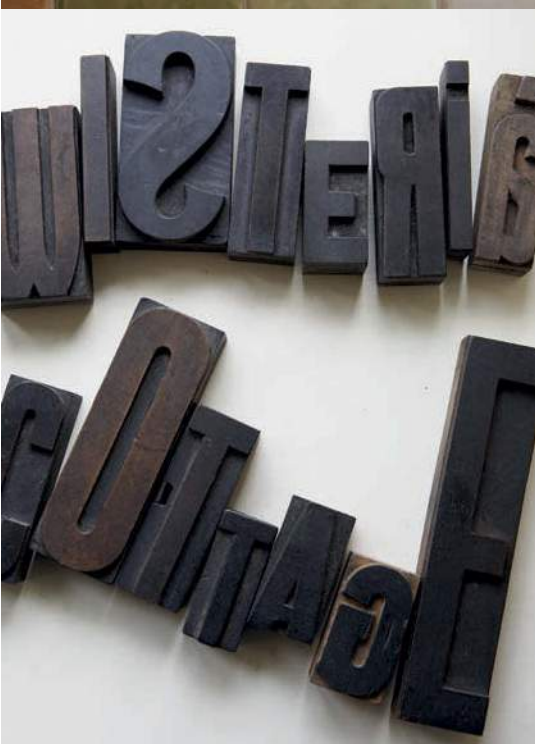
This enthusiastic pair are not quite finished making their improvements, though. Carrie says: 'The only thing we've done in the kitchen is replace the oven; but we want to change the layout of the room. I like the units, though – they're all handmade – so we'll keep those.'

'Michael's extremely good,' she says proudly, 'he built the useful cupboards, and he did all the work in the bathroom; and he's just been on a course to learn about lime pointing so that we can repair the exterior; he's a very handy person to have around the house!'

Although in their eyes still incomplete, Michael and Carrie Page's cottage has a comfy rustic feel, filled with their collections of vintage kitchenalia and wartime memorabilia, and furnished with eclectic pieces that are an expression of their personalities – it may be bijou, but it is full of character and warmth. 🏡



Clockwise from top left: With a little help from vintage cookbooks – including one from the famous Mrs Beeton – Carrie is now an expert at whipping up old favourites, like coffee and walnut cake and cheese scones; the 1940s style demands gorgeous scents and daring red lipstick. Carrie wore the aeroplane brooch on her wedding day; the spare bedroom displays an old radio and typewriter; Carrie is a fan of creative arts so has a good collection of vintage buttons and pins; vintage packaging and storage tins collected at fairs; Carrie's signature coffee and walnut cake; the couple have collected printer's blocks to spell the name of the cottage; some vintage scales help set the scene in the kitchen





Above: A remnant of carpet has been stitched around the edges to create an inexpensive runner for the stairs. Brintons has a good selection of finished striped runners. The old-fashioned light switches were bought from Period Features
 Right: The dresser had to have a wedge removed from its base to sit straight on the wonky floors
 Opposite: The sitting room is full of cosy seating. An old-style radio fits the mood. For a similar lamp, try Broughtons







This page: The spare bedroom stores vintage clothes. William Morris wallpaper has been added to a couple of walls
Opposite: A ceramic bowl on an old pine table with salvaged taps matches the reclaimed style of the bathroom. Black and white tile-effect flooring finishes the look with antique white tongue-and-groove panelling and Farrow & Ball's Cooking Apple Green on the walls







Above: In the master bedroom they decorated with roses and gingham fabric and wallpaper. The Laura Ashley paper could only be applied to one wall as they are quite uneven. The Hastings bed and Freya bedlinen from Laura Ashley add to the country feel
 Right: Carrie enjoys embroidery and collects vintage sewing bits, including buttons
 Opposite: A set of vintage luggage provides great storage at the end of the bed in the spare bedroom





BY ROYAL APPOINTMENT

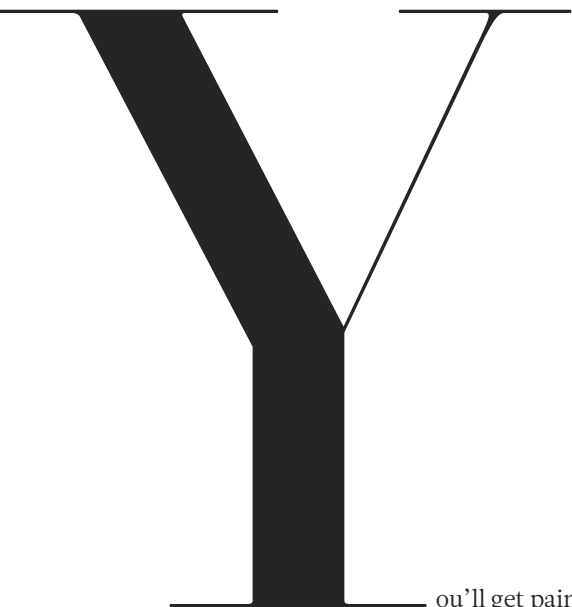
Wendy and Peter Blakeman knew what was needed to transform a dilapidated cottage into a welcoming home: neutral paints, vintage finds and a lot of DIY

Words Karen Darlow | Photographs Jody Stewart | Styling Anna Morley



With its calm colour scheme and original Georgian sash windows, the drawing room is a pleasant place to while away the hours – or watch them tick by on some of Wendy's many clocks. Wendy made the curtains and matching cushions in Kate Forman's Blue Roses fabric





ou'll get painted in this house if you stand still long enough,' jokes Wendy Blakeman. There has been no danger of that, though, for Wendy and husband Peter – since buying the 240-year-old farmhouse, they haven't stood still for a minute.

In a whirlwind few years, the couple brought the house back to life from near dereliction, added a small two-storey extension and turned over an acre of rough farmland into a series of stunning garden vistas, complete with two summerhouses and views of Derbyshire's Peak District.

Built in 1772 and bought by Queen Victoria in 1890, the property's royal connections meant that before the Blakemans could get their hands on the keys, the sale had to be approved by the Duchy of Lancaster, the main landowner in the area. 'We had to sign with the Queen for it, and the deeds came back with a big red seal,' explains Wendy. 'Sadly we didn't have to go to Buckingham Palace, but if we had, we were going to tell her just how much work we needed to do to it!' As the property had been empty for two years before they bought it in 2005, and was lived in by tenants for more than 100 years before that, there was certainly a lot to tackle.

A former nurse, Wendy felt an overwhelming obligation to take this neglected house under her wing. 'I think houses call you, don't they?' she says. 'It just needed love. It needed caring for and putting back to how it should be, and I could see what had to be done.'

It was a long to-do list, but Peter had just retired and was ready for a new project, and with plans duly submitted to the Duchy and the local planning office, they set to work. 'I've never done so much DIY. It was a real learning curve,' says Peter. 'Looking back, it turned out to be a lifesaver – a project to keep me busy when I might have found it hard to adjust to not going out to work every day.'

In fact, for the first six months after buying the farmhouse, Peter did go out to work every day – not in the record store he'd once owned, but at the house itself. He and Wendy worked from 8am

until 6pm alongside the local builder, returning exhausted each night to the house they were renting until their new home was habitable.

The house was rewired and damp-proofed, rotten windows were renovated and occasionally repositioned, but never discarded. Peter project-managed the whole operation, pitching in where he could – knocking walls down, putting walls up, sandblasting the black beams and plasterboarding between them. 'Not an easy job,' he explains, 'as the beams are all different widths and shapes, and there are scores of them throughout the house.'

In the snug at the side of the house, the original lath and gypsum floor had completely rotted away and you could see right down to the cellar. Undaunted, and asking the builder for advice when he got stuck, Peter replaced the floor, built a fireplace with bricks they'd found in the garden, and added alcove shelving.

Six months later, with the essential repairs almost complete, the couple were at last able to move in. Work then began on a small two-storey side extension to the property to house a garden room, breakfast room and upstairs bathroom. Wendy decided that the kitchen would work best without a table, so the round table in the breakfast room is where Peter and Wendy eat. Tongue-and-groove panelling, painted in Farrow & Ball's New White, is the perfect complement to the handmade Shaker-style cupboards, along with contrasting granite worktops.

In the breakfast room, Peter made the doors for the dresser top, which Wendy then painted, and travertine flooring is used in the hall, kitchen and breakfast room to link the newly built section to the oldest part of the house. Farrow & Ball's Pointing, a gentle off-white, is used on every wall – Wendy's philosophy being that 'with a neutral base you can just add a colour and change the look'. If she did fancy a splash of colour, however, Wendy could simply step outside to the barn and choose from the piles of cushions stored there. 'I have an illness,' she confesses. 'Cushion-itus. I have hundreds of them.' Wendy never buys cushions, making them instead in Kate Forman and Cabbage & Roses fabrics or, in the case of those in the breakfast room, using printed teatowels from Thornback & Peel.

The Blakemans aren't afraid of more radical changes of style, however. Their previous home was filled with traditional, dark oak furniture. Since moving here, Wendy has painted every last piece of it off-white. 'It's much easier to live with than all that dark wood,' says Peter, gesturing at the corner cupboard and cabinet in the new garden room, now enjoying a second lease of life thanks to Wendy's trusty pot of eggshell.

THE STORY

Owners Wendy and Peter Blakeman are both retired and have two grown-up children, Charlotte and Robert, who live nearby

Property An 18th-century farmhouse in Derbyshire, with four bedrooms.

What they did A full programme of renovation, including damp-proofing, rewiring, replacing floors and restoring beams, windows and doors. The roof space has been opened up to create a bedroom, living space and en suite bathroom. A two-storey extension created a garden room, breakfast room and bathroom, while a gable porch was the finishing touch

To keep the garden room cosy through the harsh Derbyshire winters, a log burner was installed in a brick fireplace and framed with an old beam, found in the garden under years of overgrown shrubs. The log burner from Robey's was one of Peter's favourite buys and keeps the whole house warm.

In the bathroom, a reclaimed cast-iron fireplace and a freestanding roll-top bath, which was so heavy it took six men to carry it up the stairs, give the room authenticity, helping to seamlessly link the old part of the house with the new.

Next on the to-do list was the loft. 'We opened it up as much as we could so our son Robert could have a living room up there as well as his bedroom,' Wendy explains. Peter also put in a stud wall to make space for a tiny bathroom.

The finishing touch to the front of the house almost didn't happen. The beautifully proportioned tiled gable porch was an afterthought that the couple felt they couldn't really afford. However, they stretched the budget, deciding that the house deserved a welcoming entrance after everything it had been through.

When the couple finally turned their attention to the garden, it really was a blank canvas. What do you do with over an acre of rough scrubland? The answer, according to Peter and Wendy, is plant 120 saplings and a small topiary garden, pack your flower borders with so many plants that the weeds don't get chance to grow, then put up two summerhouses.

Latte Lodge, the garden cabin where Wendy likes to sit and sew or chat to friends over a coffee, is an impressive space, with views right across the Derbyshire hills. Inside, in keeping with the shabby chic theme, there's a comfy sofa, a dressing table overflowing with textiles and lace, and Peter installed a log burner so they can enjoy the summerhouse all year round.

At the other side of the garden, Gull Cottage was a small tool shed that friends were throwing out, but Wendy has turned it into her very own Southwold beach hut with seemingly effortless inspiration. Shells, seaside accessories and bric-a-brac were sourced on the couple's frequent trips to the Suffolk coast and to her all-time favourite shop, Tinkers in Walberswick, which she says is a 'treasure trove of vintage finds'.

With the lids firmly back on the paint pots and the house now looking so well cared for, Wendy feels a great sense of satisfaction with what she and Peter have achieved. 'I like it to look as if it's all been lived in,' she says of their cottage. 'I've always bought houses that needed love, and I try to keep the character as well – I think that's the most important thing.' Surely, even their Majesties Victoria and Elizabeth would have to agree. 🍷



Left: Peter, Wendy and their daughter Charlotte relax in the drawing room. The mirror is from Wendy's favourite shop, Tinkers, on the Suffolk coast in Walberswick
Above: The tiled, gabled porch is one of the latest additions to the house, yet fits in as if it has always been there





A keen cook, Wendy wanted the kitchen to be a bright room, with plenty of work space. Travertine flooring is the perfect choice for this bustling area of the house, and works well with the handmade Shaker-style cupboards and worktops from Plan it Granite

This page: The breakfast room is part of the side extension to the house. Peter turned the old back door from the kitchen into an extra cupboard for crockery and made doors for the dresser. Wendy has refreshed the pine table with Annie Sloan's chalk paint in Paris Grey
Opposite: The corner cupboard and bench started life as heavy dark oak pieces; Wendy made the cushions from teatowels







Above: The magnificent French-style bed in the main bedroom, from a friend's boutique, is complemented by Cameo Rose curtain fabric by Kate Forman used for the coronet and at the windows. The chandelier is from Laura Ashley and the dressing table, from the couple's previous home, has been repainted

Above right: Space was tight in the loft bedroom, but the Blakemans shoehorned in a living area and bathroom

Right: The main bathroom is in the extended section of the house, but a reclaimed fireplace from Chase Reclamation and a bath from Norton Canes Bathrooms help the room to tie in with the rest of the house







Wendy's garden cabin, Latte Lodge, is where she likes to sew or chat with friends over a coffee. Painted fencing rails give a rustic finish for the floor, a log burner keeps it cosy, while painted shelves, a dressing table filled with vintage fabrics and piles of homemade cushions add to the homely look



A skilled carpenter, Martin made the kitchen from scratch, including the bench, using materials reclaimed from elsewhere in the house. The table is from Bramblecrest, and Tash bought the pendant lights from Solid ID

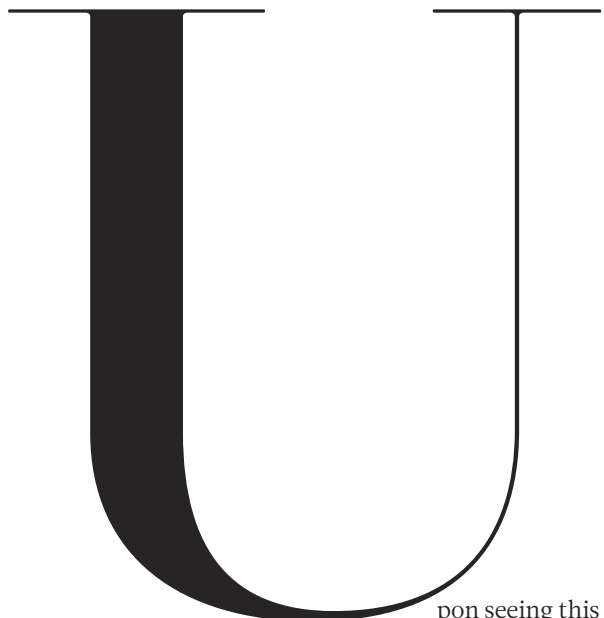


OUR HOME ON THE HILL

Tash and Martin Heydon fell in love with their converted Georgian cottage before stepping foot inside, and prepared to take on a project that required even more planning than their wedding

Words Karen Darlow | Styling Sian Williams | Photographs Brent Darby

With dogs Tilly and Daisy in tow, Tash and Martin make their way to the pond at the bottom of the garden. Martin runs landscaping company Folly Landscapes, but Tash enjoyed tackling their sloping one acre



Upon seeing this higgledy-piggledy cottage atop its challenging hilly site, many potential purchasers might have turned heel and fled. Yet Tash and Martin Heydon made the decision to buy it before even stepping inside.

Not that the interiors offered much to entice them; the cottage was dark, slightly damp, with two staircases, yet no way through from one side of the house to the other on the first floor.

The couple were under no illusions that the house was going to need a lot of work to make it suitable for them and Martin's two children, Matt and Katie. 'We hadn't looked at many properties when we first encountered the cottage on a dank and miserable February day,' recalls Tash. 'The house is on a very steep hill and the approach was really bizarre. We hadn't even reached the entrance, but we just stood on the top terrace and knew there and then that we wanted to own it.'

It was the start of a whirlwind year for Tash and Martin, who at the time had known each other for only six months. They completed on the house in May 2011 and were married in the September, with the months prior to the wedding just as likely to be spent talking about plans for the new house as plans for their big day, as the couple worked hard to bring the Georgian cottage back to life. 'The previous owners had lived here for 40 years and obviously loved it, but had done very little to it,' says Tash. 'We both like cooking, but there was no space in the kitchen, and the living room was gloomy and damp.'

Before taking on the structural changes, however, the couple had to tackle the challenging site itself. 'There was no view when we arrived, as the plot was so neglected and overgrown that we couldn't get to its boundaries,' explains Tash. 'The garden was slowly killing itself, it was so choked with brambles and weeds. So we started off in the first year by just stripping it out and opening it up

again. We also relandscaped it to create a bit of flat area in the sloping garden. It's so steep here that I can ski down it and the children can fly down the hill on toboggans when we have snow.'

This initial re-landscaping served a practical purpose, too: it made reaching the house less problematic for the builders tasked with carrying out the couple's plans for the home itself.

Martin and Tash were keen to preserve a sense of history in their renovations, particularly when they discovered the cottage had been built in 1802 as the village shop. Stone steps outside that lead to the first floor indicate that the shop was upstairs, while old meat hooks in the kitchen below show where the shop's store would have been and, at ground level, where pigs were kept to supply the shop and the shopkeeper's family. The cottage was extended around 10 years after it was built, perhaps to provide further storage and living accommodation.

'Having that history is lovely, and really adds to its charm,' says Tash. However, the old extension had simply been tacked onto the side of the house, with no access between the master bedroom and the bedrooms on the other side of the house. 'You had to go down one set of stairs, and back up another staircase – not terribly practical when Katie and Matt were staying with us,' she adds. 'The house is built in solid, 30cm-thick Bargate stone. We think that builders back then either didn't have the equipment, or didn't think it was worth cutting through to unite the two sides of the house. So while the work was done, we moved in with my parents 30 minutes away, along with the two dogs, three chickens, and, at weekends, the children.'

The family lived like this for five months as the house was gutted from top to bottom, with Tash on site every day to project-manage. 'I run an interior design and project management company and I'd worked with the builders before,' she says, 'so although it was a huge renovation, they know how I work and I could trust them to do a good job.'

With props to support the house, they had to install new steels. Next, one staircase was removed altogether and the other repositioned. The house used to have four rooms downstairs, but the couple wanted two much larger rooms so removed a wall to create a kitchen-diner. Once two rooms, the

THE STORY

Owners Tash and Martin Heydon live here, with Martin's children Matt, 13, and Katie, 10, visiting at weekends

Property A Georgian cottage near Petersfield in Hampshire, built in 1802

What they did The house has been gutted and completely renovated. A staircase was removed, and a passageway created to link the master bedroom with the other side of the house. The couple knocked through the four small downstairs rooms to create an open-plan kitchen and an L-shaped reception room. The reconfigured first-floor space still has four bedrooms



couple's L-shaped living room is now a spacious and relaxed seating area. On the first floor, the builders created a corridor from Tash and Martin's side of the house to the children's, and enlarged the master bedroom, absorbing two-thirds of the spare bedroom into a new en suite.

The build went smoothly and, with the major work completed, the family were able to move back in and start work on the kitchen. 'Martin is a carpenter and has his own landscape gardening business, so he's very practical,' says Tash. 'He built the kitchen from scratch using the original first-floor floorboards, and made glass-fronted cabinets from the old sash windows. We almost swap roles once we're home - I do most of the gardening, as Martin does that all day, and, ironically, he tends to do more on the interiors side.' To lend character to the kitchen, it was Martin's idea to make a feature of old beams from the house that had been removed because they were structurally unsound. 'At the heart of the room was a big chimney breast, so we decided to keep the curve of the chimney and put in a beam.'

Top of Tash's list for her new country kitchen was an Aga. 'We had a big discussion about the colour it should be. I wanted black, but Martin won the argument with the navy one. I have to say, though, I think he was totally right.'

Choosing a colour wasn't the only difficulty, however. Getting the Aga into the kitchen proved far more problematic, as Tash explains: 'There are steps down to the house, so we had to ask a friend with a digger to come and crane it in for us. It was our responsibility as the brand new Aga swung precariously in the air - it was terrifying.'

Thankfully, the Aga stayed in one piece and, like the couple, the children and the animals, is now comfortably installed in the cottage, although Tash admits there is still work to be done. 'We've finished the main part of the project, but there's so much more we want to do to landscape the garden. It's a quirky cottage, but it has around an acre and a half of very steep ground - people either love it or think it's impossible! Luckily, Martin and I most definitely love it here.' 🍷



The green bucket chair has been reupholstered in an Andrew Martin fabric, and the elm wood sideboard is from Hong Kong



The couple chose a hardwearing granite splashback and worktops in Leather, to complement the navy Aga cooker





A Charnwood wood-burner has been installed in the old kitchen fireplace. The sofa, from Sofas & Stuff, displays cushions in Nina Campbell's Fandango print, the oak chest of drawers is from Oak Furnitureland, and Tash bought the rug when backpacking in Nepal – for a similar style, try Veedon Fleece



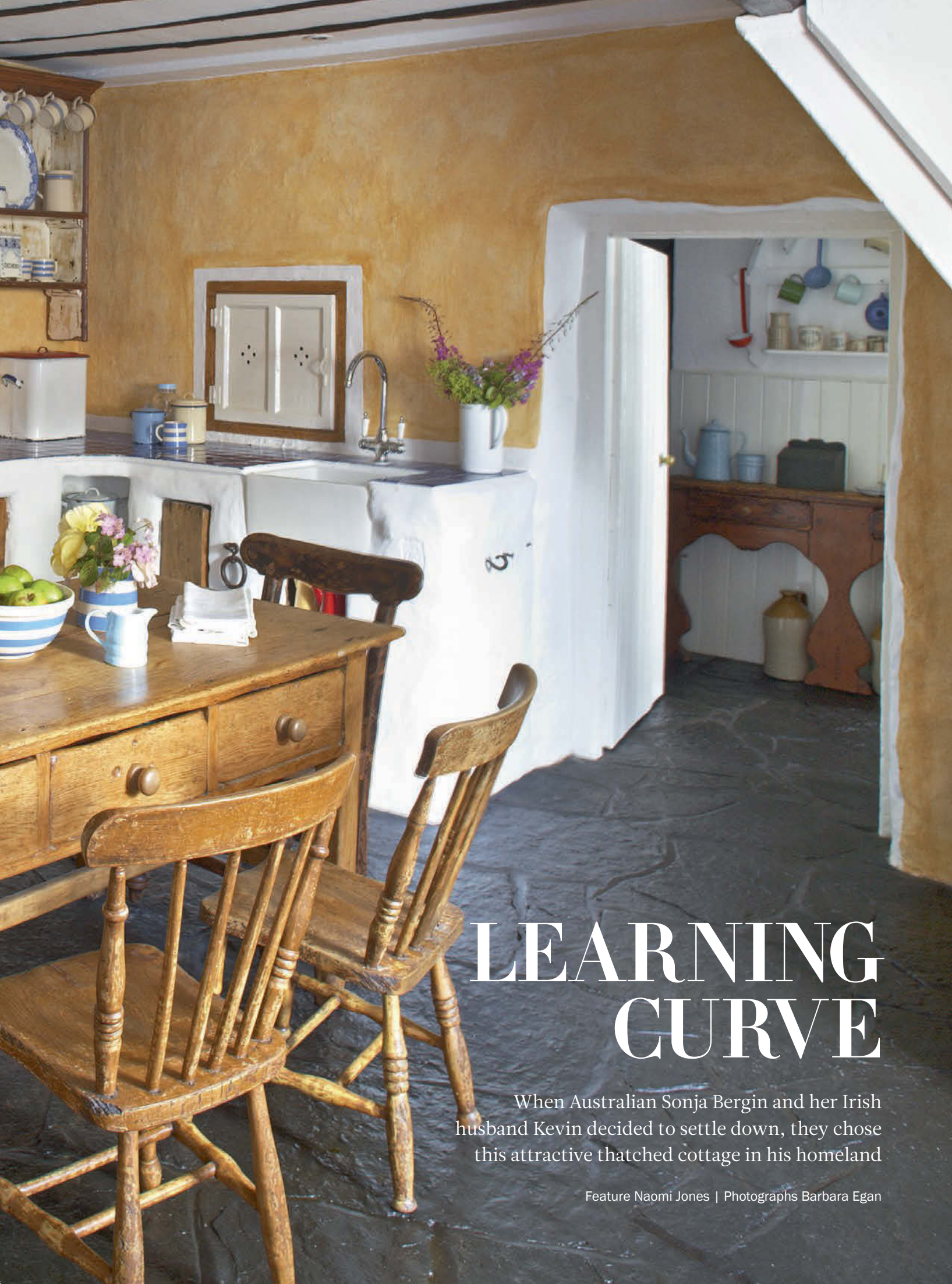
Opposite: The bath in the master en suite is from The Cast Iron Bath Company. Tash chose matching fabric – from Osborne & Little's Salon Velvet range – for all the window dressings, and painted the walls in Farrow & Ball's Dimity

This page: The curtains in Martin's daughter Katie's bedroom are an old Sanderson design, starting life in Tash's first flat. The chandelier and bedside lamps are from Homebase, and Katie chose Earthborn's Piglet paint for the walls, partly because she liked the name. Martin's stepmother made the patchwork quilt





The kitchen has a real country feel, with units set into a rustic plasterwork frame, among freestanding furniture. The walls have been given an ochre colourwash; Aged Ivory by Little Greene is a similar shade. Kevin created a plaster base for the sink and cupboards



LEARNING CURVE

When Australian Sonja Bergin and her Irish husband Kevin decided to settle down, they chose this attractive thatched cottage in his homeland

Feature Naomi Jones | Photographs Barbara Egan



fter travelling the world for a couple of years Sonja and Kevin Bergin decided to buy a home in the Irish countryside, where Kevin had spent a happy childhood. They chose a thatched stone-built cottage and spent two decades renovating it.

'It took nearly a year to buy this house,' explains Kevin, 'as the purchase was subject to planning permission for a septic tank. This was frustrating but it gave us more time to gather funds: we couldn't get a mortgage as the building was thatched and had no services, so we had to apply for a personal loan.'

'However, there was great excitement when we finally got the original key the following summer,' Sonja adds.

Although the property had been empty for 12 years, it had been well looked after: while the roof needed initial repairs, the building was structurally sound. However, there was just electricity in a couple of rooms, no running water and no indoor lavatory. Sonja explains: 'As Kevin and I didn't know much about traditional renovating, we hired a builder to bring it up to a habitable standard.' He put in timber and stone flooring, plastered the walls and ceilings, built a partition wall for the bathroom and inserted a staircase for the master bedroom, which had been accessed by a ladder. Meanwhile, Kevin wired the property, and his brother-in-law helped him with the plumbing for the bathroom and kitchen.


Unfortunately, the work had included finishing some of the walls with concrete; years later, Kevin went on specialist courses and learned that it wasn't good for the house so set about putting it right. Repairs included chipping back the modern plaster and redoing it with lime, which Kevin mixed and applied himself; with the help of his brother, Joe,

he also repointed the walls using lime mortar and finished them with 12 coats of limewash.

As and when time and money allowed, and when new knowledge was gained, the restoration progressed. 'When we first bought the house there was a plywood ceiling in the kitchen,' says Kevin, 'and when we removed it we discovered a massive beam that spanned the room; a huge hearth had been blocked up as well so we restored this to its original state.'

Beneath more cladding, other apertures have been discovered throughout the house. 'There's a small window in our bedroom that still has one tiny shutter on it,' Sonja says. 'It had been blocked up with stone by a previous owner. And there are useful recesses and cupboards built into other walls.'

Further work has included stripping wooden floors upstairs, painting the floorboards in the master bedroom pale blue, and redecorating. 'We wanted to maintain the whitewash on the exposed stone walls, inside and out,' says Kevin, 'and we freshened up the woodwork – the exterior window frames and door are now blue.' But to complete the biggest job – replacing the thatch – they've had to call in professional help. 'Last year, we hired a local master thatcher,' says Kevin. 'He found nearly two tonnes of junk in the old thatch: there were concrete slabs, tin sheets, slates and plastic bags all hiding under the straw.'

'Thanks to Kevin's vision and hard work,' says Sonja, 'our home is a protected structure (Ireland's equivalent of a listed building) so the architecture will hopefully survive for generations to come.' 

THE STORY

Owners Sonja Bergin is a medical scientist and her husband, Kevin, is an electrician

Property Early 1700s thatched stone cottage in Louth, Ireland. It has three bedrooms and sits on a three-quarter-acre plot

What they did The couple repaired and rethatched the roof, introduced electricity and plumbing, replastered with lime, and refinished the floors





Top: Sonja and Kevin have renovated their thatched cottage beautifully; master thatcher Peter Childs was employed to restore the roof
Above and left: The sitting room has splashes of colour in the accessories and a substantial bookcase made by Kevin. The fire was revealed beneath a Victorian insert



This cosy guest room has a bed from Delvin Farm Country Antiques, and the blanket is from John Hanly. The old chest came from the antiques market in Blackrock; it's framed by the wonderful original beams and plank door, all carefully restored by Kevin. A distressed cabinet, from an antiques shop in Belturbet, stands beneath an old portrait bought from a fleamarket in Athens

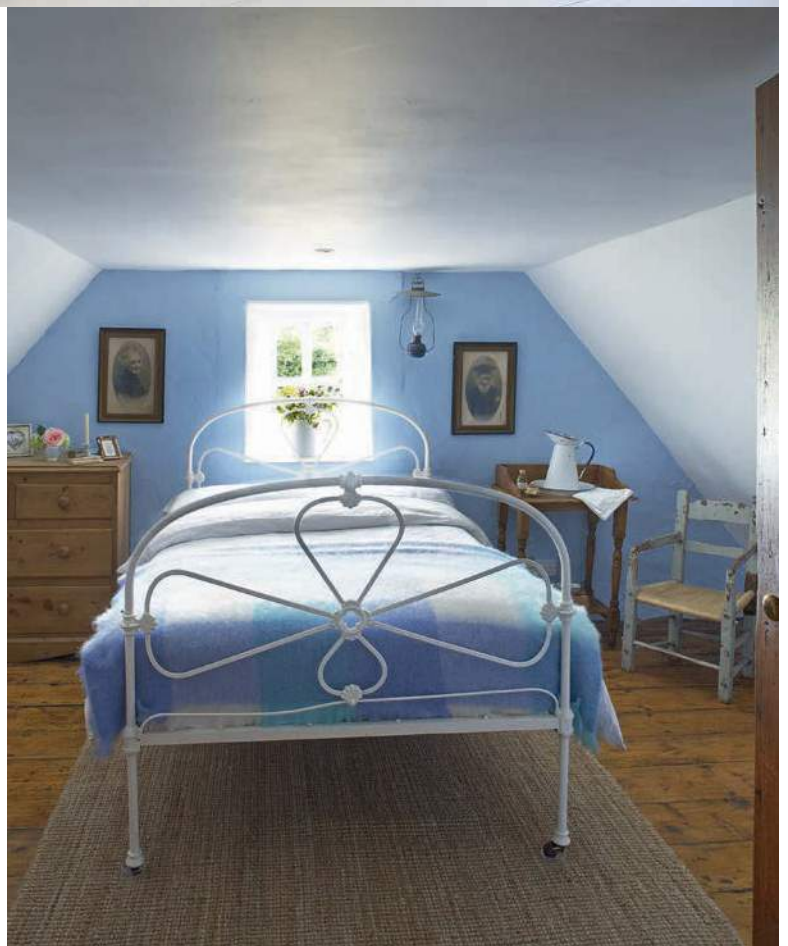




Above: Kevin painted the floorboards pale blue in the master bedroom; the bed was bought at McAllisters Auction Rooms in Drogheda and the chest is from Delvin Farm Country Antiques. The blue and white blanket came from Foxford Woollen Mills

Right: Kevin stripped the floorboards in one of the guest rooms. The bed is from Delvin Farm and the blanket from Avoca

Opposite: A roll-top tub (similar can be bought from Victorian Plumbing) has been painted in a deep blue, adding colour to the whitewashed bathroom







PURE AND SIMPLE

Fate, good management, and skilled craftsmanship all played a part in Simon Fenwick's rural restoration project

Words and styling Karen Darlow | Photographs Darren Chung



Opposite: An alcove was created to house the electric Aga range cooker. The wall lights are from Original BTC, and the curtains from Ian Wright Interiors
This page: The sink and tap were salvaged from the house, and the pendant lights are by Industville



Househunting is a big part of Simon Fenwick's life – not that he moves house very often himself, but it's actually his job. He finds, renovates and manages period properties on behalf of his clients. And it was on one of these searches that he discovered Elm House.

'I'd looked at more than 30 options for a client who wanted a country home in the Cotswolds. This one was by far the best,' says Simon. 'The client's sale fell through, but meanwhile I'd fallen for the property and the area.' So, in August 2009, Simon found himself the owner of a new home.

Many of the house's original features were still intact, and Simon soon started to get a feel for the renovation that lay ahead. 'I was lucky as it hadn't been messed around with too much, but it also hadn't been well maintained,' he says. 'Horrible windows had been fitted in the 1960s, along with ugly radiators and dodgy pipework and electrics.'

Having previously practised as a chartered building surveyor before setting up his company, Simon wasn't short of inspiration. 'The house dictated what it needed and I used my experience of what worked in other people's homes,' he says. 'I was determined to restore it as sympathetically as I could and to a high standard of craftsmanship.'

Simon discovered that the Cotswolds is home to skilled practitioners of all manner of crafts. The builder, CN Builders, is based just down the road, carpenter Jon Hitchcock is a neighbour, and blacksmith Ben Landucci, of Iron Forged Designs, who made stair rails, garden furniture and a new front gate, is based in nearby Brackley.

'I thought it might be difficult managing my own renovation,' says Simon. 'But I was able to stay fairly removed – although there was a moment when it

was all stripped out and bare, when I thought it would never go back together again!'

Simon kept his nerve, though, as a two-storey extension was built; plaster was hacked away; floors were removed; electrics and plumbing renewed; and windows replaced with oak-frame casements, left unsealed for a natural look.

The house was uninhabitable during the work, but Simon travelled up once a week to keep an eye on progress, taking the opportunity to size up the space for furniture and finishes. 'With a restoration like this, every detail counts,' he says, 'and I wanted to make sure I didn't let the house down.' Such was his commitment, that he examined every plank in a shipment of wide oak floorboards from France before granting them a place on his floor. Even then, he admits to getting the fitter to take them up and start again. 'He'd cut out some of the knots and cracks, but I like boards with character. Plus, I'd wanted bigger gaps between the boards.'

Luckily, the other details were less problematic. 'During the build, I visited auctions and antiques shops, and spent hours on the internet buying furniture and accessories,' says Simon. 'Everything was bought specifically for this house.'

By February 2015, the renovation of the property into a comfortable country retreat was complete. Simon is a convert to the restorative powers of the countryside, and sees himself staying in the Cotswolds for good. 'I am on the lookout for a bigger place with more land, though,' he adds. 'However, I've got so attached to all the things I've bought for this house that I'll take them with me. Next time, I won't be starting from scratch.'

THE STORY

Owner Simon Fenwick, director of Sentinel Residential, a company that project manages the restoration of historic and listed houses

Property A Grade II-listed home, built in the 1640s, near Burford in the Cotswolds. There are four bedrooms, plus a kitchen/breakfast room, formal dining room and a living room downstairs

What he did A complete renovation of the property, replacing the roof, floors, windows, plumbing and wiring, plus a two-storey extension



Left: Built in classic Cotswold stone, Simon Fenwick's home dates back to the 1640s and has undergone a complete renovation since he bought it in 2009

Above: Simon in the kitchen, where bespoke units by Woodchester Cabinet Makers, painted in Farrow & Ball's Lichen, complement stone tiles from Natural Stone Consulting, and a rustic table and chairs from Burford Garden Company. All the walls are painted in Farrow & Ball's Wimbourne White



Above: Simon oversaw every detail of the home's restoration, down to inspecting each individual reclaimed floorboard in the living room and sourcing the 17th-century fireback. The door to the left of the fireplace is a second staircase, now only used for storage

Right: Like much of the furniture in the living room, the Flemish tapestry came from Lots Road Auctions in London

Opposite: Most of the windows were replaced, but the glass was reused. The windows, shutters and seat are by nearby Hitchcock Woodworks. Soft furnishings are all by Ian Wright Interiors





This page: The roll-top bath in the en suite was salvaged from the house, with taps from Victorian Plumbing. The planning department specified the conservation rooflights

Opposite top: Simon managed to preserve enough original elm floorboards, taken from the study, for the guest bedroom, giving it a characterful look. The cast-iron bed is from Victorian Dreams and the bedside lamps from Cotswold Home & Garden in Chipping Norton

Opposite bottom: The master bedroom is decorated in warm neutrals that set off the rich tones of the original beams. The bed is from Victorian Dreams, the armchair from Lots Road, and the sisal carpet from Cotswold Carpets





MILESTONE COTTAGE

Alison Lewis planned to mark her 50th birthday by buying a diamond ring, but instead she bought this gem of a house – and has never looked back

Words and styling Karen Darlow | Photographs Jeremy Phillips

Flora finds a cosy spot in front of the Rayburn. Annie Sloan's Paris Grey coats the larder cupboard from Notions Antiques





The unusual 'witch's hat' fireplace in the dining room is a real talking point with dinner guests. The table, from Silver Apple Furniture, is painted in Paris Grey by Annie Sloan to match the dining chairs, covered in a vintage chintz fabric by Jean Monro



he picture-perfect Lincolnshire cottage belonging to Alison Lewis almost wasn't hers. She had always promised herself that when she turned 50, and her children were grown up, she'd pay off her mortgage and buy herself a diamond ring. 'The only way I could afford the ring was to sell the barn conversion I was living in at the time,' she says. 'But somehow I found myself sidetracked by looking for another project, and the diamond ring was forgotten.'

She started her search for a rural property in Norfolk. 'The idea was to have a country bolthole, within easy reach of the coast,' she explains. 'Somewhere to escape to with my labrador Flora, and that I could eventually turn into a holiday let.'

Property prices were on the rise, though, and Norfolk seaside homes were edging beyond Alison's budget. A friend suggested she consider the largely undiscovered Lincolnshire coastline, around Anderby Creek, so she headed north.

Hill Farm Cottage, not far from Louth in the heart of the Lincolnshire Wolds, was the result: a two-bedroom, early-18th-century thatched house, with a pretty garden surrounded by gently undulating countryside. 'When I first walked inside the cottage, it hugged me and instantly I knew I had found my gem,' she says.

The property had belonged to an antiques dealer and his wife, and when Alison viewed it, it was difficult to see round the heaps of antique furniture crammed into the tiny rooms. Yet she knew that with a lick of paint, and some minor repairs here and there, she could soften and refresh the look of her slightly tired new home.

Alison loves to collect furniture from antique centres, junk shops, and family, often painting them in soft, chalky tones to give them a new look. As you come into the house through the kitchen, you see three such pieces – the butcher's block, pantry cupboard and corner cabinets, which combine for the perfect unfitted look, along with the Aga Rayburn and flagstone floor.


In the dining room, the impression is of an almost circular space, accentuated by the 'witch's hat' fireplace, typical of the area. Alison still needs to carry out further repairs to get this into use, but for now it makes a quirky focal point in this cosy room. When she's ready to make those repairs, she knows just the man for the job: Robert E Ley, a local woodworker and artisan craftsman, who is no stranger to the cottage, having restored it eight years and two owners ago, following a fire.

The yellow-brick Victorian addition to the cottage, which houses the downstairs bathroom and living room, took the brunt of the fire, and so Robert had new bricks made by the original brickyard, still in existence, to replace those damaged by the heat and smoke. Beautifully restored, the living room is now a comfortable space, to which Alison has added feminine accessories, with a sofa and paintings.

At the top of the stairs, Alison papered the wall with a book-print wallpaper from B&Q. 'Instead of a visitors' book, I ask my guests to nominate their favourite book,' she explains, 'then I write it onto the spines of the blank books on the wallpaper. I've had some great recommendations for bedtime reading!' And what better place to curl up with a good book than in the master bedroom? Alison has given an ordinary pine bed a coat of on-trend grey paint to suit the quiet, muted tones of the room, with its glorious views of the garden from windows on two sides.

She admits to being something of an interiors addict: 'Strangely, it all started as a young girl, when I had so much time away from home, at boarding school,' she says. 'I spent weekends with friends who lived nearer to the school, in all kinds of properties – from grand country houses and London townhouses to tiny cottages, which spurred an interest in interiors that's never left me.'

She is currently renovating a Victorian house in Grantham, and comes up to Hill Farm Cottage at weekends 'to enjoy a bit of luxury after all the dust on my building site during the week,' she says. It's also a chance to catch up on some gardening and reading, and to have friends over for afternoon tea in the inherited shepherd's hut in the front garden, once full to the roof with the antiques dealer's excess stock. It's a different story now, though, with a pretty table and chairs always at the ready for impromptu guests.

Flora the labrador is getting used to her two homes and, like Alison, relishes the long weekend walks and the occasional paddle at a nearby beach. However, once the Grantham house is completely finished, Alison plans to use Hill Farm Cottage as a holiday let, so that other people can enjoy the calm and unspoilt views from this gem of a cottage in the Lincolnshire Wolds. And then, perhaps, she might finally be able to buy herself that much coveted diamond ring. 



Above: The thatched farmworker's cottage, dating back to the early 1700s and extended in Victorian times, was Alison Lewis' 50th birthday present to herself

THE STORY

Owner Alison Lewis, who heads an equality and access training organisation, lives here with labrador Flora. Alison lets out the cottage for weekends and holidays (hillfarmcottageinthewolds.co.uk)

Property A mud and stud cottage, built in the early 1700s as a farm tenant's dwelling, extended in the Victorian era. It has two bedrooms, two reception rooms and a quarter-acre garden complete with shepherd's hut
What she did Although the cottage has undergone dramatic restoration due to a fire, this work was completed before Alison owned it, and her changes were mainly cosmetic







Alison put together a pretty, feminine look for the living room. The curtains came from her previous home, and were adapted to fit the large sash window by Clare Tye, who edged them with a vintage Osborne & Little fabric. A fire insert painted in Farrow & Ball's Pelt stands out against walls in Wevet. The sofa is from Silver Apple, the chair from an antiques shop in Winchester, and the rug is from TK Maxx



Above: Alison painted an old pine bed in Dove Grey by Laura Ashley to match the neutral master bedroom scheme, and updated the floorboards with Johnstone's Morning Mist. The antique French linen curtains are edged in a vintage fabric from Osborne & Little
 Right: Alison freshened up the bathroom with a lick of paint. The sanitaryware was fitted by the previous owners
 Opposite: She decorated the second bedroom with younger guests in mind. The bedside cabinet is from The White Robin, and the curtains and bedlinen are from Decorative Country Living





RETURNED TO GLORY

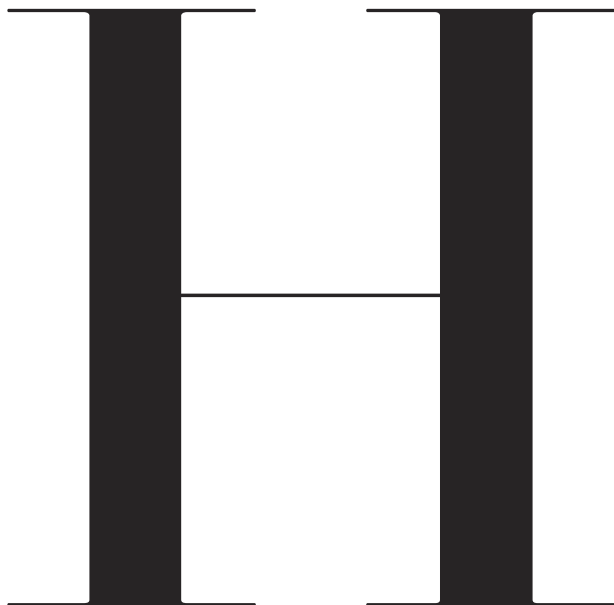
Holly and Phil Keeling have completely restored a Georgian farmhouse in rural south Devon to create a light-filled family home

Words Karen Thomas | Photographs Brent Darby | Styling Sian Williams



The kitchen has been painted in Farrow & Ball's Pointing and the cupboards in French Gray. The limestone floor was from Devon Stone in Topsham; Holly bought the blind fabric from Zoffany





olly Keeling describes finding 'a slice of heaven' when she discovered Heathfield Farm. Set in nine acres and surrounded by beautiful Devon countryside, it's easy to see why she and her husband Phil fell in love with the house. 'Before moving here, Phil and I were living in a Georgian townhouse, where we had been for over 10 years, but we wanted a change – and a challenge.'

Holly first viewed the house a year before she and Phil bought it. 'Though I loved the house then, we weren't ready to take on such a big project, and we didn't have the money to buy it,' she says. 'Then, the following year, the agents rang to say the house was back on the market as the sale had fallen through. I went back to look at it with Phil this time, and he fell head over heels too. The price had come down considerably, which helped towards the renovation work. We only had a month to exchange, so we were lucky to find a cash buyer for our own property.'

Holly and Phil spent three years renovating the house to create a home for themselves and their three children, Ben, Louis and Charlotte. 'We could see the house had potential to be a fabulous family home,' she says. 'We loved the proportions and the sizes of the rooms, and with masses of space outside for the children to play in, we knew it could be an exceptional family home for us.'

The earliest deeds show that the house was built around 1830, and it is typical of the Georgian era with large rooms and high ceilings. It looks grand from the front, but the back, which is older, looks like a country cottage. 'As I understand, additions were built as the farmer who lived here became wealthier,' says Holly. The house has an elegant stone façade, but because of the position overlooking the moors, it had suffered a lot of damage from the wind and rain, so Holly and Phil were advised to have the house painted. 'I worried for a long time about getting the colour right as it's an expensive mistake to make, and I really wanted

to do the house justice as the original stone exterior is one of the reasons we were attracted to it in the first place. We didn't want to paint it like all the other Devon farmhouses, which were either white-yellow or pink. We finally settled on the colour range Jungle Drums by Dulux Trade, which is an off white with a green/grey tone, and painted the window frames in a darker shade from the same range. I'm really pleased with the results as I think the tones blend well with the surrounding countryside and have a subtle, aged appeal.'

Inside, the house was in a terrible state. There was wallpaper hanging off the walls, floorboards were loose and rotten, and there was a merry-go-round of colours in each room. A black slate floor throughout downstairs had been laid on an uneven sand bed, windows had been boarded up, and there was a significant damp problem.

'Outside, the roofs in all the attached outside buildings had caved in, and we weren't clear exactly what land came with the house as the grounds were too overgrown to walk around. But we had a good feeling about the house and it still had all its original features, even down to the metal butcher's hooks in the study – the house used to be a farm and the study was the dairy,' Holly says.

The Keelings set about restoring all the original features, which needed to be stripped back and treated as, over the years, they had been stained in dark varnishes, hidden under carpet, painted in layers of coloured paints, or boarded up with wood panels instead of glass. 'The main fireplace had an enormous crazy paving-style surround,' Holly adds.

After Holly and Phil moved in, the first job they tackled was reroofing most of the house. Other major work soon followed, including pulling up the black slate floor in the kitchen and study and laying concrete to get an even surface for the new limestone floor. 'We sold the old black slate to a local reclamation yard, which very conveniently helped to raise more funds for the renovation,' says Holly. 'We also removed all the inbuilt fixtures that we felt just weren't in keeping with the property, including plenty of cupboards, shelving and bookcases, which were all in modern stained pine,' she says.

The house has beams in the kitchen and lovely big sash windows with wooden shutters overlooking the moors. 'When we moved in, there were three sets of stairs going up to the first floor – the main stairs, one leading from the back hall up to Ben's room, and one in the kitchen, which the kids thought were great for playing hide and seek,' adds Holly. 'But after the limestone floor went down, I decided that the stairs in the kitchen had to go, even though Phil wanted to keep them. They took up a lot of space and made the kitchen very dark. We then had to ask the floor company to come back and fill in the gap where the stairs had been, but it's been worth it as the kitchen is now much more light and spacious.'

Holly and Phil had the hall and kitchen replastered and created a whole new floor in the attic, which has been transformed into a large bedroom with en-suite bathroom. They have brought more light into the house by putting extra windows into some of the darker rooms and fitting neutral carpet throughout. They've also reused materials from the house where possible.

Holly explains: 'We found lots of unusual white bricks in the garden, which we used to pave the utility room. It's worked well as it looks like it's always been there, and we later discovered that they're local Victorian bricks.' They also managed to build a new garden room to the side of the house using materials from the outside loo and pigsty.

'Sourcing materials at a good price was time-consuming,' admits Holly, 'but it's important to keep a tight control on your budget on a project like this. It's definitely worth restoring all the period features that are intact, such as original windows and fireplaces. Our house still had its original glass, which was very thin, so we invested in proper insulation.'

Holly says: 'I did quite a bit of the practical work myself – limewashing the second sitting room floor, ripping out kitchen stairs, painting the garden room, and designed all the interiors myself. You learn a lot renovating and project-managing your own home as you have to make sure that things are thought out and done in sequence, otherwise you waste a lot of time and money. It's best to be on site every day to supervise and check that things are going in the right place.'

'It has been very difficult renovating a house with young children around. At one point, we were camping in the garden while concrete was being poured into the kitchen, and I was doing the washing up in the bath. But luckily it was summer, and camping out seemed to make it fun for the children. It's so satisfying taking a house back to its former beauty, and adding your own touches. I love the house as it is now and wouldn't change anything. I'd like to renovate another period property, but Phil and the children won't let me move from here!' 



THE STORY

Owners Holly and Phil Keeling have three children, Ben, 10, Louis, seven, and Charlotte, two. They also have a Korthals Griffon called Henry. Holly is starting a 'house doctor' business and Phil works as a consultant cardiologist

Property A south Devon farmhouse dating back to around 1830. It has six bedrooms and three bathrooms

What they did The couple renovated the house, including reroofing, rewiring and replumbing, removing a staircase, changing the flooring and rearranging the bathrooms



The lamp in the second sitting room is from Vintage Living in Totnes. The chair is upholstered in Acorn and Leaf fabric by Vanessa Arbuthnott





The walls in the sitting room are painted in Farrow & Ball's String. 'One of the best bargains I found was this crystal chandelier, which I bought at Totnes market for £60,' says Holly. The large sash windows have their original shutters, which have been restored. The fire screen and Chinese rice barrels were both from Rendells Auctioneers. 'People at the auction houses laugh at the things I buy because they haven't got any real value, but I think they look great when I get them home,' says Holly



The garden room was built using materials from the outside loo and pigsty. Cushions in florals and stripes have been arranged on a vintage day bed





Above: The bedroom has a sumptuous feel with soft textures and muted colours. The Louis-style bed is upholstered in a neutral fabric with a studded edge, complemented by a delicate canopy and velvet bedspread. Simple bedside tables are teamed with Art-Deco-style glass lamp stands with shades in a harmonising tone

Left: The beautiful wooden bed in the main bedroom is from Pugh's Antiques in Honiton; the lighting was found at TK Maxx

Opposite top: The walls in Charlotte's room are painted Edwardian Lemon by Dulux, with one wall wallpapered in Floral Trail from GP&J Baker. The mirror and rug both belonged to Holly when she was a child, and the doll's house was a car boot find

Opposite bottom: Tongue-and-groove panelling tempers a floral feature wall in the bathroom. For a similar bath, try The Albion Bath Company

LABOUR OF LOVE

With painstaking craftsmanship and an eye for every detail, Neil McKay rescued his characterful farmworkers' cottage from the brink of dereliction

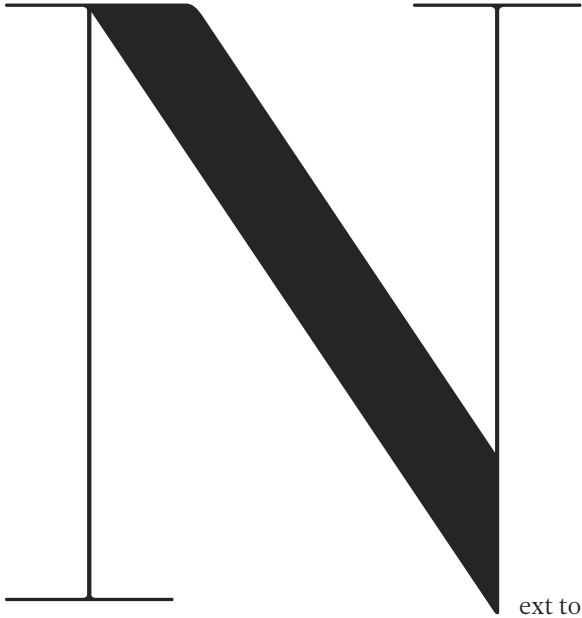
Words and styling Karen Darlow | Photographs Brent Darby



With its Victorian range, the dining room is cosy in winter. Neil used salvaged beams to give character to this rebuilt section

Neil built the kitchen cupboards and elm shutters, and the door was a salvage find, along with the characterful shelves and table





ext to the duck pond, at the heart of a sleepy Oxfordshire village, sits Neil and Helen's part-thatched cottage, which appears as though time has stood still. In fact, quite the opposite is true as nothing much has stood still here, least of all Neil, whose single-handed renovation of this mid-17th-century home has kept him busy part time for 10 years.

Built as part of a row of seven farmworkers' dwellings, the cottage hadn't been lived in since the 1980s, and the main section had almost completely collapsed by the time Neil spotted it up for auction. 'The walls were only visible to sill level,' recalls Neil. 'Other than that it was just a wooden shack with a crinkly tin roof, used as a coal shed and store.'

What Neil saw in the cottage went far beyond that crumbling shell. An architect by trade, he traced the marks that history had left on the building, gradually piecing together its story from the architectural clues. 'There is some evidence that there may have been a dwelling on the site before the mid-17th century,' he explains, 'but there's this large chimney and fireplace, which you wouldn't expect to see in a peasant cottage before the mid-17th century, so it was probably either built from scratch in the 17th century using materials from another property or remodelled from an older house on the site.'

He also discovered that the central part of the cottage had been substantially rebuilt in the mid-18th century, 'Part of the adjoining cottage had been used to enlarge this kitchen, which would explain why there's another fireplace there. So we've worked with the floor plan as it was remodelled, and whereas the living room and bedroom above it were more of a careful restoration, this side of the cottage has been a reconstruction to the 18th-century plan,' says Neil. 'Getting the plans approved was fairly easy – it's what I do for a living – but there were still some tussles,' he adds. 'The conservation officer said my plans for the dining room windows weren't

traditional and preferred a two-light style, but luckily I had a late-19th-century photograph of the cottage showing a three-light window that had most likely been installed as part of the Georgian remodelling – so that resolved that particular issue.'

Other discoveries in the thatched section included the lino floor upstairs, which can be dated exactly, as beneath it are newspapers from the week of the Queen's coronation in 1953. Behind a 1970s fireplace in the living room below, Neil and Helen were delighted to find a bread oven, now restored to working order, and a salt shelf. The joinery and distinctive door latch at the foot of the stairs were further evidence that, apart from the fireplace and lino, the last time any serious work was done on the cottage was around 1790. 'It's rare to find something that hasn't had any significant alterations in that period of time, and it's such a humble property,' says Neil. 'We're not talking about a manor house or a stately home here, it was a farmworker's cottage and it would have been very easy to take away the charm by doing something inappropriate. Because there aren't any elaborate cornices, or joinery to stamp its character, the character comes from its simplicity and the small details of the property, and it's very easy to lose that.'

Neil had a vision for the house that now, 11 years later, he considers truly realised. He rebuilt the main section using a reclaimed oak frame put together by the builders, with a skin of Cotswold rubble stone and lime mortar on top, infilled with Hemcrete – an eco-wonder material made from hemp and lime. 'It's breathable, flexible and offers a high thermal mass,' says Neil, 'and it allowed us to lay the stone outside in a completely traditional fashion, still giving us good insulation, which allows the ground-source heat pump to work at its best.' The builders did the groundworks and got the basic shell of the building up, then Neil called on specialists for the windows, and tiled and thatched roofs, finishing everything else himself using mainly reclaimed materials.

At the heart was Neil's determination to keep a clear distinction between the rebuilt central section, and the renovated part of the cottage, the most obvious difference being in the roofing materials – Cotswold stone tiles for the rebuilt section, thatch in the other. 'There is a tendency to want to tidy up history, and to have a row of cottages all looking the same,' he says. 'But the fact is that they have been there for 400 years, and in that time there were changes and boundaries moved around and rebuilt slightly differently, and that's part of the character and the history, so I didn't want to lose that.'

Once the fabric of the building was intact, Neil turned his attention to the finishing touches. Reclaimed flagstones, salvaged doors, a kitchen pieced together with a selection of auction finds, and shutters and worksurfaces made from

reclaimed elm all find new life in the cottage against a backdrop of authentic lime plaster and paints. Neil mixed the paint finishes himself from the raw ingredients. 'With equal quantities of linseed oil, egg and water, it's more like mixing mayonnaise than paint,' he smiles. 'You just add some colouring, iron oxide, or titanium dioxide and a tiny quantity of lamp black – very fine soot. It's touch dry within an hour and lasts wonderfully. It's breathable and has similar qualities to the wood and lasts well so reduces maintenance costs.'

Another addition, that brings character and a welcome extra source of heat in the dining room, is a mid-19th-century Yorkshire range, an auction buy that, after a little careful attention from Neil and a couple of replacement parts from The Yorkshire Range Company, is now in working order. 'Like the bread oven, it just takes a bit of practice to work out how to use it,' says Neil. 'But on a winter evening, with the shutters closed and the range lit, this room is so cosy – not the draughty old cottage you'd expect.'

But then nothing about this cottage is as you'd expect. From the impressive environmental performance, with its ground-source heat pump and underfloor heating, for which Neil lifted and relaid the flagstones, to the Hemcrete insulation and rebuilt central section, there have been surprises at every stage. 'The fact that people come to the property and can't initially tell that this part is reconstructed is frustrating in some senses, but also an immense compliment,' says Neil. 'The difficulty with conservation work is that if you do it right, most of the time you can't see that anything has been done.' But the hours of research, reconstruction of period details and patient repair of salvaged finds that define this project would say otherwise. 🏡

THE STORY

Owners Neil McKay, an architect, and his fiancée Helen Davison, a graphic designer, live here

Property A part-thatched cottage, built in the mid-17th century. With a kitchen, central dining room and living room on the ground floor, an original bedroom is reached by a cupboard staircase, while a new staircase gives access to two further bedrooms and a bathroom. There is also a wet room on the ground floor

What they did The main section of the cottage, containing the kitchen and dining room, had collapsed and required rebuilding; the other side of the cottage was extensively renovated. Neil used modern equivalents of authentic materials and installed a ground-source heat pump, underfloor heating, and insulated the ceilings and walls



The reclaimed front door opens straight into the dining area, where the beauty of the oak frame is clearly visible







Opposite, clockwise from top left: Double stable doors open onto the back garden and bring extra light into the kitchen. Antique filing drawers provide a useful extra worksurface under the pretty wall-mounted shelving, found on Ebay; behind a 1970s fireplace, the original inglenook was found intact, complete with salt shelf and bread oven, now restored by Neil. Above it are the front door keys; Mid-century modern meets 17th-century simple in the living room, with Ercol sofas and flagstone floors, lifted to fit underfloor heating, and lime plastered and limewashed walls. Homemade linseed oil paint was used for the door. The patterned cushions and wool rug are by Vanessa Arbuthnott

Above: The master bedroom now features a new dormer window. The cushions are from Vanessa Arbuthnott

Above right: Neil and Helen opted for more contemporary fixtures and fittings from UK Bathroom Warehouse and Ikea. For similar blue and white tiles, try Topps Tiles. The grey hammam towels are from Salt House Interiors

Gardens contents



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The painted 'dogs' barn' is a pretty picture with its changeable collection of interesting finds, drying produce and assorted containers





A CREATIVE TOUCH

With many focal points that draw the eye, this country garden can be enjoyed year round from quiet seating areas

Words and photographs Leigh Clapp



KEY FACTS

Character

Informal and flowing to complement the surrounding views to the Downs. Sheltered garden rooms link with outside seating areas

Size One-and-a-half acres

Aspect Mostly south facing

Soil Poorly drained clay

Owners Lance and Fiona Smith, since 1995

Date of house 17th century

When Lance and Fiona Smith bought Stonehealed Farm in East Sussex, in 1995, the garden was a blank canvas, offering fine, if very windswept, views of the South Downs. Other challenges to be met were the clay soil, high water table and hot, dry summers at the time. 'The heavy clay was pickaxe territory – quite disconcerting,' recalls Fiona. There were a few trees, including Monterey cypress and a towering ancient oak, possibly the same age as the 17th-century house, a few fruit trees, and a perimeter hornbeam hedge that was very overgrown; generally the space was little more than a pony paddock.

Today, the one-and-a-half-acre garden has a very relaxed atmosphere with harmonious, billowing planting and detailing that has just the right balance between formal and informal country style. This was achieved slowly, working from the house outwards, with the garden evolving into areas designed for outdoor living and year-round visual interest. 'It is good to have little pockets of seclusion,' says Fiona. A sense of division has been created by planting trees, shrubs and dense borders, sometimes enclosing internal views and at others looking out to the surrounding countryside.

Now a truly passionate gardener, Fiona came to it late in life. 'I did a simple garden design course, got hooked, and followed it with an OCA garden design course (part of the Open University), and ended up tutoring and helping others when it ended. My garden is my tool and creating it has been a steep learning curve.'

The first priority was to establish a paved path to the house, edged with densely planted borders. By breaking up the soil and applying mulch and generous amounts of mushroom compost, this has allowed abundant planting to establish and thrive. 'It is lovely in May, with fresh greens and new perennials popping up, such as geraniums, astrantias and aquilegias, with touches of purple from the wonderful alliums.' Bordering the path on one side is loose meadow planting of grasses and a 'family' path of named stepping stones, while on the other side is a hedged circle of massed *Allium hollandicum* 'Purple Sensation'.

For the small front garden, the essence was to be more formal. The space was gravelled and then laid out with circular hedged beds of box with yew used for the perimeter and topiary accents, including clipped spheres. It faces west with no view so it was important for it to be its own picture by the house. Infill softens the formality, with *Wisteria floribunda* 'Alba' draped on the house, and scent from the roses, honeysuckle and delicate lilac, *Syringa microphylla* 'Superba', filling the air. 'I wanted a layout with formality from the box among overflowing plants, burgeoning with flowers in summer and coming back to its bones in winter.'

Close to the house are paved and gravel terraces, softened by relaxed planting, which can be enjoyed at different times of the day. The mature oak houses

a platform suspended high in its branches. 'It gives wonderful views of the Downs and overlooks most of the garden, and is also a lovely place on a summer evening to catch the cool breezes,' adds Fiona.

Artful arrangements of terracotta pots brimming with drought-tolerant plants, such as pelargoniums and succulents, lend a sense of being in the Mediterranean. A timber shed, actually the dogs' barn, painted in dusky blue, has eclectic objects placed along its veranda. An array of jars and watering cans and even strings of drying onions become 'found sculpture'. 'It changes all the time depending on what takes my fancy,' says Fiona.

Gravel paths lead through cool, shady areas abundant with ferns and hostas, including the blue-green 'June', grey 'Halcyon' and green edged with gold 'Hope', to a tranquil pond. It is crossed by a timber serpentine bridge, which appears to be nearly floating on the surface of the water. Deceptively simple, this curving platform was actually quite a challenge to install, taking hours to lay out the timber planks to form the effect. 'It echoes both the shape of the Downs and also the spiral staircase to the tree platform.'

From the pond and up a few steps, wilder planting, with a grove of 25 silver birch set in long grass and a maturing lime walk, blends into the fields beyond. Heading back to the garden, lawns spread out and lead to other sections. Some unusual key plants draw the eye, including *Eleagnus* 'Quicksilver' with its silvery-grey leaves and tiny yellow scented flowers, arching *Exochorda x macrantha* 'The Bride' and the vanilla-scented evergreen laburnum. One border is all russet tones with *Iris* 'Rip City', red *Euphorbia griffithii* 'Fireglow' and *Foeniculum vulgare* 'Purpureum'.

Guiding the development of each garden room has been Fiona's philosophy for a sense of continuity. 'Texture and foliage is my priority; I use different shades of green and then colour is the icing on the cake. I don't want colours that distract from the views. I use hotter tones in internal sections, where there are no external vistas. Scent is also important,' she says.

Partially hidden is a favourite area for Fiona and Lance to enjoy the summer evening sun, with its casual grouping of timber chairs and an arbour surrounded by curving hot borders of dahlias and perennials. 'We do love the idea of being able to go to different areas of the garden at different times, to sit with friends or have a cup of tea. The light changes so much, sometimes you need warmth or shade or the evening sun. Seats make a garden inviting, more welcoming and lived in.' 🍵

Opposite: Muted pale blue timber obelisks, which punctuate a soft border, echo the harmonious pastel combinations of pink 'Coral Charm' and 'Bowl of Beauty'





This page, from top: Dense borders edging the front path have splashes of white astrantias and purple alliums; bronze fennel is planted with russet-red *Iris* 'Rip City'

Opposite, clockwise from top left: Purple spires of *Salvia nemorosa* 'Caradonna'; glorious blooms of *Paeonia* 'Coral Charm'; striking *Aquilegia vulgaris* var. *Stellata*; *Allium hollandicum* 'Purple Sensation' is planted in masses








A serpentine bridge spans the pond and leads on to a grove of silver birch





A vibrant garden scene featuring a large, leafy tree in the background. In the foreground, there's a well-manicured lawn with a curved path. To the left, a tall, narrow evergreen stands next to a rounded yellow shrub. The center is dominated by a large bush of pink flowers, with a green trellis structure in front of it. To the right, a large green bush is visible. The sky is blue with some clouds.

The approach to the cottage is plentiful, with roses, irises and poppies against a foil of lawns, clipped accents and hedging. 'Pink Perpétue' roses adorn the house's wall, while 'Ena Harkness' surround the door.

COTTAGE BEAUTY

Eileen and Phil Prosser have created an abundant planting scheme around their picturesque home, resulting in a mix of formal and informal spaces

Words and photographs Leigh Clapp



KEY FACTS

Size One-third of an acre

Aspect Various, including south-facing rear

Owners Eileen and Phil Prosser, since 2002

Date of house 17th century

Opposite: The couple have incorporated seating areas around the garden to enjoy the beds that are bursting with a variety of mixed planting

The first time that Eileen and Phil Prosser saw their 17th-century cottage, nestled behind a church in the Kent village of Kingsnorth, they knew that it was going to be their long-term home. 'Previously we had moved every two or three years, but in 2002 when we saw the house, we knew it was the one immediately,' says Eileen. 'There was no garden really – just a lollipop bay tree by the front door, and a hebe – but we could see the potential.'

Candlemass Cottage is set on an unadopted lane, a quintessentially English scene with an ivy-clad arched gate leading into the garden, where roses drape over supports and an assortment of cottage favourites meet the eye, including lupins, daisies, foxgloves and delphiniums. Beyond, the view of the picturesque brick and tile-hung property unfolds. 'We wanted the cottage to look nestled in, as if the surrounding garden had always been there.'

Having retired from the antiques trade, Eileen and Phil have an eye for pieces that give personality to a space. Add to this Eileen's love of working with textiles, from samplers to patchwork quilts, and a passion for gardening since childhood, and you see how this eclectic garden came into being. The garden plot surrounds the house on three sides, with a cottage style to the front and a more formal layout to the back. With the church on the west side, and the placement of laurel hedging, the site is quite protected from westerly winds. The various aspects, including the south-facing rear garden and manageable loamy soil, have allowed a variety of different plants to thrive.

Spending most days out in the garden whatever the weather, the couple work as a team, indulging in their shared interest. 'We are not great at planning; the garden has just evolved,' says Eileen. 'When you have a creative eye, each time you do something it leads on to seeing another potential. Between us the ideas keep flowing. Phil tends to have a more formal idea and likes wooded areas, while I am more "country cottage" and love an array of flowers.'

Although it is a relatively small plot of just under a third-of-an-acre, a journey has been created through the garden with the planting and structural elements, change of textures underfoot, and clipped hedging and topiary. There are even secret areas to be discovered beyond archways smothered with climbers. Starting with hard landscaping to give shape to the layout, Phil built a series of pergolas, arches, supports, fencing and a potting shed. 'He also laid a winding path using bricks sourced from a local salvage yard,' says Eileen. 'It goes from the gate to the front door and continues around the house, so we don't have to walk on the grass. In addition, he used reclaimed bricks to form a terrace at the rear.' The couple also used slabs of reconstituted Yorkstone as pavers.

Seating is incorporated throughout. 'We sit in the front garden to have afternoon tea, when the sun streams across at its hottest and brings out the fragrance of the cottage flowers,' says Eileen. 'The

back terrace is our place for morning coffee, and we have our final cup of tea of the day in the gravel garden, where we get the last of the sun.'

In the far right-hand corner of the rear garden is the summerhouse, which the couple built 10 years ago. 'I wanted one that wasn't too enclosed, with lots of windows to see the garden; somewhere to do my sewing and to relax,' Eileen explains. 'We painted it green and filled it with an old sofa and wicker chairs, then hung botanical pictures on the walls. It's lovely sitting outside it on a Sunday morning, listening to the choir singing in the church.'

Planting is extensive, generally sourced from local garden centres. 'We mostly buy small plants rather than seed, as I am fairly impatient,' says Eileen. 'I have probably spent £12,000 on plants over the last 15 years. I know that sounds a lot, but roughly £20 a week goes on some plant or shrub. For us, visiting the garden centre is like being a child in a sweet shop.'

As befitting the cottage style, the garden has an abundant feel. Graceful acers draw the eye, as does a tiered *Cornus controversa* 'Variegata' and a number of wonderful viburnums, including the more unusual *V. davidii*, *carlesii* and *burkwoodii*. Over 50 roses and 25 clematis feature through the garden, covering the cottage walls, supports and arches. Some of the loveliest roses include wine-purple 'Roseaie de l'Hay', scented 'Albertine', clear pink 'Perpetue', the vigorous old favourite 'Ena Harkness', 'Rambling Rosie', which is still in flower into November, and the creamy white 'Madame Alfred Carrière'. 'I love all the perennials, especially geums that stand tall with their little bobbing flowers – and every cottage garden must have foxgloves,' says Eileen.

Plants are also propagated from cuttings to increase stock, such as *Erysimum*, which get woody and need replacing regularly, and then grown on drainpipes and containers out of sight beside the house, before a spot is found to display them.

Detailing is eclectic, with vintage painted watering cans dangling from a pergola by the house, containers are of various kinds, and peeping out of a border is a topiary teddy bear. 'We have grown most of the topiary ourselves out of our shrubs; it adds some structure to the loose cottage planting,' says Eileen. 'A *Viburnum tinus* is now a teapot; *Lonicera* forms a chicken and teddy bear, and we have some balls of box. Statuary and other pieces are sourced from antiques shops or garden centres.'

Keeping the garden looking good is a never-ending task for the couple. 'Every evening we walk around it together, secateurs in hand – we don't get very far before seeing something to snip,' says Eileen. 'It took until its fifth year for the garden to begin to look like the picture we had in our mind's eye. The whole space has our personality on it – from the arched gate and the winding paths to vistas and secret shady areas. It's an oasis of tranquillity, and the place where I am happiest.' ❧





The church makes a charming backdrop to the garden, the mellow stone blending with the layered greens from Italian cypress, *Acer palmatum* and conifers, plus a jumble of daisies and roses





Clockwise, from above: The summerhouse displays some of Eileen's textile handiwork and is furnished with Lloyd Loom chairs; graceful acers are dotted throughout the garden; found objects and statuary create an eclectic scheme; lots of cottage garden favourites provide a riot of beautiful colours



The overview
from the house
is of shimmering
movement in muted
tones from arching
grasses including
Miscanthus sinensis
'Morning Light',
Calamagrostis x
acutiflora 'Karl
Foerster' and purple
toned *Molinia*
caerulea subsp.
arundinacea
'Transparent'



TEXTURAL TAPESTRY

A complete change of direction saw Gillian Pugh replace her formal garden of hedging and roses with drought-tolerant grasses and informal flowers for autumnal hues

Words and photographs Leigh Clapp





KEY FACTS

Character A textural meld of late season perennials and ornamental grasses in a drought-tolerant garden, including exciting colour combinations and a walled garden

Size 0.4 hectares (one acre)

Aspect South and south-east, in a sheltered climate

Soil Poor, thin chalk, free-draining, alkaline

Owners

Gillian and Richard Pugh

Location

Broughton, Hampshire

Date of house

Around 1850, incorporating two cottages, a cattle yard and barn, which were converted from an abandoned 'downland steading'

Opposite: Caught in the sunlight, the grasses and spires of verbasum shimmer beside the *Amelanchier lamarkii* 'Juneberry'

Gillian and Richard Pugh have created two gardens at their Hampshire home, The Buildings, since they moved there in 1972. Starting with a totally blank canvas – as the walled plot surrounding the rustic farm cottages, cattle yard and barn had only been used for housing stock – the first transformation was into formal hedging around a central bed brimming with a jumble of roses.

The garden you see today, however, could not be more different. In response to a series of hot, dry summers in the late 1980s and 1990s, when the roses struggled to do well in the chalky, thin alkaline soil, Gillian looked for new inspiration. This was found after a visit to the gravel garden at Beth Chatto's Essex garden in 2002, as well as encouragement from fellow Hampshire plantsman John Coke of Bury Court, then owner of Green Farm Plants Nursery, to try grasses. 'It hit me like a bolt from heaven, and I immediately wanted to take everything out and start again to make a dry garden,' explains Gillian. 'I know what I like, and I got really keen on using grasses and perennials, much like Piet Oudolf's prairie style.'

Starting from one corner, it took two years – with help from the ever-supportive Richard – for Gillian to redo the whole garden. Beds and plants were removed, along with the enriched topsoil they had built up over the years. 'To create a dry garden you need to "de-nude" your soil so that it is not too rich, and it must be free-draining – chalk is ideal,' Gillian says. With some added assistance from friend and garden designer Catherine Lucas, plants were selected and the soil mulched with gravel. 'Catherine had the idea of a snake of grasses in the middle, echoing curved paths that intersect the garden.'

The resulting design, with its focus on the large central round bed of prairie-style planting with an inner sunken brick circle, can best be seen looking down on it from the first floor of the house. Wafting, sinuous grasses, including *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Morning Light', *Molinia caerulea* subsp. *arundinacea* 'Transparent', and *Calamagrostis* × *acutiflora* 'Karl Foerster' mingle with burgundy *Sedum telephium* (Atropurpureum Group) 'Purple Emperor', heleniums and salvias. Adding height are free-form plants such as ironweed, along with the ever popular *Verbena bonariensis*. The effect is quite mesmerising, with the textural, shimmering sea moving in the slightest breeze. Colours are of muted parchments, burnt oranges, dusty pinks and deep mauves in a tapestry reminiscent of an Impressionist painting.

Fringing the lawn are further borders that continue the grasses and flowers theme. Large blocks of echinaceas, eryngiums and heleniums, valued for their blooms and even their rich brown remnants, are joined by delicate fennels, euphorbias, asters, splashes of salvias and *Sedum* 'Matrona', in a meld of autumnal splendour. Gillian, who was brought up in the exotically rich palette of Pakistan,


is brave with colour combinations, undaunted by zingy lime greens or clashing bright oranges against candy pinks, all jostling together but connected and cooled by the tempered green and parchment grasses. Over autumn, the hues deepen and mellow until almost transparent skeletal forms stand against winter's pale sky.

'Grasses and perennials are a brilliant thing as they don't start until late in the year – it's wonderful anticipation,' says Gillian. 'So many gardens are good earlier but have nothing later. We have seven months of gloriousness.'

The lawn, gravel paths and a paved patio by the house anchor the exuberance. A nod to formality remains, with containers of clipped buxus beside the alfresco dining area. At the peak of autumn, the scene is backed by the changing foliage of deciduous trees, including *Amelanchier lamarkii* 'Juneberry' (snowy mespilus) on the garden's boundary, and berries from young *Malus* 'Evereste' (crab apple) dotted on the lawn. Even the old barn, with its crumpled corrugated roof, glows in the sunlight as part of the cacophony of burnished colours.

'I love it when I look down on the garden from my bedroom window in late autumn,' says Gillian. 'It is the mix of hues – apricots, rusts, all gleaming in a wonderful palette – interspersed with flowers, such as salvias still blooming, along with the seed heads and a few structural elements, such as the box, to give it a bit of strength.'

The change from a formal rose garden to wilder, quite contemporary prairie planting, suits the pale mustard rendered farmhouse and rustic farm buildings, and links beautifully to the arable fields beyond. Gillian, who gardens by instinct, happily goes along with the flow as the garden takes its own course as well. When nature lends a helping hand with plants self-seeding, including *Nigella damascena* (love-in-a-mist) or white poppies, they are embraced. 'I tend not to worry too much about colour and grading of heights. It is extraordinary how things tend to find their own level. Contrasting leaf shapes are important and not too many grasses. Maybe it's not everyone's cup of tea, but I find it absolutely gorgeous and ever-changing,' she says.

Although the vagaries of the weather has meant some unpredicted wet summers and prolonged snowy and cold periods, the garden continues to flourish, protected by the perimeter flint walls. There have only been a few casualties and the need to replant some perennials, such as achillea, annually. 'When I get a gap, though, it is a good opportunity to add something,' says 'plantaholic' Gillian. 'If I see a photo or a new plant in someone's garden, it's half the fun to source it on the internet. I pot up a baby I may find in the gravel and propagate everything.' 





In late autumn, the warm
burnt tones in the garden
work beautifully against
the colour of Gillian and
Richard's home



A full-page photograph of a garden. In the foreground is a green lawn. A large, vibrant garden bed filled with various flowers, including pink, yellow, and white blooms, runs across the middle ground. To the right, a large cottage with a thick thatched roof and dark wooden trim is partially visible. To the left, a smaller brick building with a gabled roof and arched windows stands. The background is filled with dense green trees under a clear sky.

PRETTY AS A PICTURE

Jill Ede has created an idyllic scene with a flowing garden that is bursting with life, set around her quintessential thatched cottage

Words and photographs Leigh Clapp



A long flower bed edged in bedding begonias frames the pretty thatched Hampshire cottage, which dates from the 17th century

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KEY FACTS

Character

Set beside the Basingstoke Canal, this tranquil, secluded country garden with cottage-style planting offers a long season of interest. Plants are also chosen for the resident bees, and there is creative use of recycled objects

Size Five acres
Aspect Encircles the house

Soil Acidic, sand to clay, with a high water table and natural springs

Owner Jill Ede, since 1986
Date of house A thatched mid-17th-century property, originally a gamekeeper's cottage, from the neighbouring Dogmersfield estate

When Jill Ede bought her pretty thatched cottage in 1986, it hadn't been lived in for four years, so her first priority was to renovate and extend it. Set in a clearing beside the Basingstoke Canal in Hampshire, and surrounded by dappled woodland, the cottage's garden was a blank canvas, which over the years Jill has developed into a relaxing haven. Having lived all over the world, first working as a botanist in the Australian outback, and then as an air hostess with British Airways, she drew on various influences for the design.

The garden has evolved slowly, as Jill developed it from the cottage outwards, the swathes of lawn edged with densely planted flowerbeds. The land had previously been a smallholding, so the only cultivated plants were a couple of conifers, fruit trees and some mature trees. When planning the planting, Jill had to consider what would cope with the high water table and natural springs on the land, along with the acidic soil that varies from sandy to clay. 'I also wanted to use plenty of reliable, easy care plants that would establish happily. I would say I am more of a Margery Fish style of gardener (a doyenne of carefree, cottage garden style) with a shoehorn rather than a trowel,' says Jill with a smile.


'I have a covered earth policy to keep the moisture in and weeds suppressed,' she adds, in explaining her rather eclectic cottage style, which sees a succession of densely planted blooms throughout the year. From spring bulbs, including thousands of daffodils, through billowing wild flowers, summer roses and peonies, to late-season choices, such as *Colchicum autumnale*, Japanese anemones, cosmos and asters, the scene subtly changes through the year. 'I like to use lots of home-grown annuals, pollinated by our bees and fertilised by our donkeys,' explains Jill. 'I also always have plants in pots that are waiting in the wings, ready to fill any gaps in the borders. Some are then sunk in the ground in their pots, others planted in.'

Self-seeders are actively encouraged, such as geraniums, forget-me-nots, poppies, *Lychnis coronaria*, sweet William and *Lunaria annua*, or honesty – a nod to Jill's role as a Justice of the Peace. Linking the effect are the shades of greens from

shrubs and mature trees that gradually change from fresh astringent limes to more muted tones, while the vertical element is also considered with clematis and roses scrambling up supports.

Areas are divided by low buxus hedges propagated from 100 plants, simple rustic fences and archways smothered with climbers. Care has also been taken to have a balanced eco-system. 'We have fruit trees that have been given to us as gifts from friends and family, and a modest vegetable garden edged in box and mulched with our sheep's wool,' says Jill. Here you'll find beans and tomatoes climbing the arches, architectural heads of artichokes and clouds of fennel.

Dotted throughout the garden are quirky focal points created from a range of rustic recycled items. 'I can't abide waste, so am always on the lookout for something of interest or that has been abandoned, to transform it into something useful,' says Jill. 'For instance, I took some old tools to the blacksmith to have them made into a gate for the vegetable garden.' You may spot unusual containers brimming with plants, such as an old bathtub by the front door. Another passion for Jill is keeping happy the bees that live in weathered timber hives nestled under the apple trees. 'I love to see "the girls" busily going about their tasks and being part of a community without any fuss or bother. Oh that the human race could manage so well! I position a chair beneath the fruit trees so that I can admire them working while I sneak a coffee break, or watch them drink from the natural spring water that seeps out at the base of an old stone wall.'

Jill opens the garden through the National Gardens Scheme for a day in April, July and September, and hosts stalls selling plants, music from a local band and teas in aid of Sebastian's Action Trust – which supports families of seriously ill children. The September scene is relaxed as the garden reaches its late season glory of dahlias, a final flush of roses, starbursts from the asters, accompanied by the golden glow from stands of sunflowers and coreopsis. 'After the open day it's time to reflect on what went well in the garden,' Jill says, 'using the yearbook I keep of what's planted where, so I can plan any changes.' 

Opposite, from above: Hedging and a quirky gate made from old tools enclose the vegetable patch; white snapdragons, old cottage garden favourites, encircle the rustic sundial and link with the white dining setting






This page, from top: Ivy trails out of an old painted wheelbarrow set in a shady corner of the garden, while red begonias echo the colour of its wheels; industrious bees buzz around their old timber hives, placed among the apple trees



Opposite, clockwise from top left: Cactus form *Dahlia* 'Tahiti Sunrise' adds star bursts in the border; second flush *Rosa* 'Hot Chocolate' continues a touch of romance in the cottage garden; Japanese anemones sway in the slightest breeze, making a charming sight; *Clematis* 'General Sikorski' scrambles up the pergola; long blooming *Phlox paniculata* 'Amethyst' works well with a burst of Jamaica dahlias; sunny helianthus add height to the borders; half-hardy single-flowered *Dahlia* 'Catherine Deneuve' makes a show among the greenery; autumn crocus adds a touch of soft pastel charm; deep purple asters bring delightful colour to the garden in late summer and autumn





A photograph of a garden path made of irregular stone slabs. The path leads from the foreground into a dense thicket of green plants and flowers. On the right side, there are tall purple flowers and yellow daisy-like flowers. On the left, there are ferns and other green foliage. In the background, a bright green lawn is visible through an opening in the foliage. The overall scene is lush and vibrant.

The borders are filled with late-season interest from sedums, *Persicaria amplexicaulis* and *P. bistorta*, clumps of dancing cosmos and *Verbena bonariensis*

Borders frame the lawn,
billowing with *Verbena
bonariensis* and *Nicotiana*
against foils of clipped
Buxus and *Taxus baccata*
'Fastigiata'.





LOOK TO THE HORIZON

A rural location with views to the South Downs has informed the textural and colourful Malthouse Farm gardens, created by Helen and Richard Keys

Words and photographs Leigh Clapp



KEY FACTS

Character

Country style. Formal areas by the house give way to a field designed in grids, orchard, wildlife pond and meadows

Size 5.5 acres, 1.5 of which is formal garden

Soil Heavy clay, neutral; mulched every year in December with mushroom compost and manure

Aspect South facing
Owners

Helen and Richard Keys, since 2001

Date of house Victorian farmhouse. Extended by the couple into the stables and dairy

Set quite high in a peaceful, rural area of East Sussex, with wonderful views to the South Downs, the now mature gardens of Malthouse Farm have been created since 2001. Both ornamental and productive areas, spread over a series of garden “rooms”, create a sense of light and movement in high summer.

When Richard and Helen Keys first moved to the Victorian farmhouse, the landscape surrounding it was completely different. ‘There wasn’t really a garden and we’ve done virtually everything,’ explains Helen. ‘There was a minimal amount of herbaceous planting by the house, expanses of lawn, an old orchard with apple trees unfortunately at the end of their lives, a piggery, a concrete vegetable area and a sand school.’

Tackling the heavy blue clay soil by breaking it up and digging in copious amounts of mushroom compost was the first task Helen undertook. The vision for the garden then began to unfold in her mind. ‘I do a lot of garden visiting and certain places inspired ideas that I thought I could adapt and do here. For example, le Jardin Plume in Normandy gave me the idea for a grid system of mown grass in the field, and then I added a snail mound for viewing the effect. I also visited Bury Court for the Piet Oudolf-inspired perennial planting.’

One of the first projects was to put in a pleached hornbeam hedge to provide some protection against the winds – ‘we get the full force of south-westerlies,’ says Helen – while not spoiling the views, in particular those from Richard’s study, which looks out over the garden to the Downs. Then as she worked from the house out, the garden areas gradually evolved.

Armed with the knowledge gained from creating their previous garden, and from a garden design course with Mariana Hollis, Helen enthusiastically transformed the landscape. ‘I wanted to separate the garden into sections, with the areas by the house more formal but then as you progress to the fields the formality would become looser.’

She created a box parterre in the small front garden, punctuated by a large urn as well as clipped buxus cones and spheres. These are interspersed with bulbs of narcissi and *Fritillaria meleagris*, which are followed by small sedums and *Pennisetum orientale*, adding movement among the buxus design. ‘I use grasses throughout the garden to bring texture into planting schemes.’ An existing well draws the eye, along with colourful seasonal containers by the front door, where in summer, shade-loving fuchsias and begonias add bright colour accents to the foil of green.

At the back of the house, a large circular lawn was created and fringed in deep, densely planted cottage-style borders. Here the theme of buxus continues, with sentinels of spherical standards retaining structure year round against the ephemeral succession of herbaceous planting. Six fastigiated golden yews also give structure in the borders, as does the frame of pleached hornbeams.

A tapestry of infill in a harmonious blend of soft pinks, blues and white flows around the space, with highlights including repeated *Rosa* ‘Cornelia’, clouds of *Verbena bonariensis*, clipped *teucrium*, spires of *Salvia nemorosa* ‘Caradonna’ and frothy white laceflower, an alternative to bullwort, which was a bit too big in the scheme. ‘I fill in any gaps with annuals, such as *antirrhinum* and further *Pennisetum orientale*, as I like to use a sort of rhythm around the garden,’ Helen explains.

Near the paved patio by the kitchen, Helen then created a decorative potager with produce and flowers in raised timber-frame beds. ‘It was quite an easy thought to have four square beds, although at first it was just intended to be a herb garden, which didn’t work. I now grow a wide range of vegetables, although find root vegetables difficult because of eelworm,’ she says. The beds brim with chard, their brilliant stems catching in the sunlight, varieties of beans scrambling over supports, as well as a tasty array of salad choices. To one side, cutting flowers abound, including fragrant sweet peas, alstroemerias, the giant purple thistle heads of globe artichokes, cosmos and vibrant dahlias.

Against the perimeter brick wall is a painted timber arbour, built to Helen’s design. This cushioned, cosy seating area is framed by containers and completed with a collection of rustic tools attached at the top. ‘I can look out from the kitchen window and the scene makes me happy, especially on warm days with the door open; it feels like you are on holiday.’

Moving down the gentle slope of the garden, Helen has planted hot borders that peak late in the season with fiery and golden tones. Dahlias feature prominently, including ‘Autumn Lustre’, ‘Bishop of Llandaff’ and ‘Giraffe’, within an interplay of sedums, in particular ‘Red Cauli’, *salvias*, *crocosmias*, sunflowers, towering lilies, *Tithonia rotundifolia* and the continuing thread of ornamental grasses, such as *Stipa gigantea*, *Miscanthus nepalensis* and *Calamagrostis x acutiflora* ‘Karl Foerster’. Helen and gardener Alex Bell have also made sculptures and supports from a large bed of willow planted in the field for the purpose. They clearly have a lot of fun creating shapes, spheres, flowers and even people out of the willow.



Before going through a gate into the wilder meadow, willow tunnel and grass grid areas, is a little formal corner of silver balls and topiary. 'I call it my Chelsea moment, as it's where I found the silver ball fountain and the garden has evolved around it,' says Helen. The scene then turns to more naturalistic elements in the most recent areas of the garden. An avenue of *Sorbus aria* 'Majestica' leads to a metal gazebo, there are shelter beds of walnut trees and red oaks, a birch maze and an orchard, a pond with gabions and stone around it, as well as the twelve-grid grass garden area with fire pit and viewing mound. On either side of a grassy walk narrow beds of scattered flowers radiate out with oxeye daisies, poppies and wafting *Verbena bonariensis* and *Salix hastata*. 'I tried wildflowers here but they didn't take, so I collect seeds from the garden and throw them down here. I don't mollycoddle them, just see what takes. I am also trying to establish some wild daffodils and primroses for spring interest.

'The garden is constantly evolving and changing,' Helen adds. 'I want to do some more planting around the pond, add more sculptures and develop the stream of flowers in the field. Then I'll have to buy more land as I'm running out of space!'



Above, from top: The garden spreads out behind the house, with a lovely vista over the series of garden rooms; a little hidden decked garden is a secluded place to sit surrounded by salvias and herbs, fringed with *Hakonechloa macra* 'Aureola' and adorned with containers of exotic-looking eucomis, or pineapple lily




The wilder areas of mown grass grids and orchards, with the backdrop of views to the South Downs



Out from the kitchen is the decorative potager, with raised beds filled with produce and cutting flowers, overlooked by the bespoke arbour





Willow balls dangle
from a tree, echoing the
tufty blue spheres of
echinops planted below





COTTAGE GARDEN DESIGN

A quintessential English cottage garden brings to mind romantic planting, billowing with old-fashioned favourites. Learn how to achieve this look, wherever you live

Words and photographs Leigh Clapp

Cottage-style planting of swathes of nepeta and *Alchemilla mollis*, with roses behind. Harmonious, more orchestrated colour works beautifully against stone walls

The concept of the cottage garden has evolved into the prettiness of a rural idyll we think of today – a garden bursting with colourful blowsy blooms, all growing in an apparently glorious muddle. This style of garden design has come a long way from its origins of British peasants planting around their humble dwellings to supply the family with food and medicine.

From Tudor times until the Victorian period, the cottage garden was functional rather than decorative, with an emphasis on productive culinary and medicinal plants, and flowers to aid pollination filling any spaces in between. The style began to change in the late 18th century, when members of the gentry romanticised rural cottage life and created their own cottage gardens with an abundant planting of flowers.

Cottage gardening reached its peak during the Victorian era and, with the rise of mass production and distribution of food, the ornamentals became the focus in the garden. Prominent garden designers helped to popularise this more decorative version. William Robinson advocated wild, naturalistic gardens using a mix of native and exotic plants; Gertrude Jekyll took a painterly approach with her hardy flower borders, developing the principle of treating the garden as a whole, with sections flowing from one to another; and Vita Sackville-West's romantic style saw abundant planting, self-seeding and artistically combined colours, but in an orchestrated, controlled way.

RULES OR NO RULES?

Typically the cottage garden surrounds a quaint home adorned in scented roses and climbers, is a confined space with no lawn, and intersected with paths. However, whether you want to evoke a chocolate box image or just draw on elements of the flower-filled cottage style in a border, the appeal is popular for both country and urban dwellers and any garden size.

Cottage gardens are romantic, relaxed, free flowering and fun; they can be planted with pastel tones or brighter hues that you love. Part of the ethos of a cottage garden is imbuing it with your own personality – there are no rules, just plant what you love to create a garden that appeals to you.

WHERE TO START

Start small so that it doesn't get out of control; learn how to keep the plants fed and looking abundant, then gradually increase the size. As with all gardening, ensure the soil is good, rich in organic matter, and that the plants you choose suit your conditions and are good performers.

Generally cottage gardens suit sunny rather than shady spots. Apart from the visual prettiness, there is the added bonus of biodiversity, with plants rarely suffering from diseases and pests due to the wide choice of options available, and

many varieties ideal for attracting beneficial insects and wildlife to your garden.

This is not, however, a low-maintenance style. Keeping a cottage garden blooming takes effort. You will be kept very busy mulching, watering, feeding, deadheading, cutting back, dividing, planting and tweaking the design.

PROFUSE PLANTING

Although cottage gardens look haphazard, some thought needs to be given to planning the effect. You are aiming for a succession of blooms that give a tapestry of colour. The best plants to use are simple varieties that haven't been overly bred, and are high performance while being tough and reliable. Think old-fashioned favourites, including geraniums, roses and foxgloves, to create an informal, casual atmosphere, and plant them close together, ignoring standard spacing.

Let plants flop over and weave through each other. Voluptuous, effervescent, fragrant and self-seeding choices will help you create the look. Multi-petalled flowers will give that romantic feel, such as blowsy peonies and old roses.

MIX AND MATCH

You don't need to be confined to only authentic plants, though, as a colourful mix of bulbs, perennials, annuals and flowering shrubs will give a year-round vision with more structure.

Consider the height and spread of the plants. Although the usual arrangement is to put the tallest plants at the back and the shortest at the front, why not try some taller plants in the middle? Climbers scrambling up supports give background and can also be used among the profusion on rustic obelisks, while perennials, such as delphiniums, aquilegia, phlox and pinks, planted in clumps are the backbone, popping up year after year. Traditionally hollyhocks were planted against the cottage wall, as before houses had damp courses the plants helped draw moisture out of the wall and keep the foundations dry. Today they immediately give the feel of a cottage garden, whether against the wall or towering out of a border.

Sow easy-to-grow long-lasting annuals and wildflowers, including calendula, cornflowers, nigella and biennial foxgloves, to fill any gaps. Over time self-seeding plants will pop up randomly in unexpected spots, giving an interwoven lightness and artlessness to the design.

Include some evergreens among the herbaceous for interest through winter, and for a nod to the past incorporate edibles; step-over-apples could be used as boundaries, chives to edge the paths, medicinal and aromatic herbs interspersed, or chard nestled in among the flowers.

FEATURES AND STRUCTURES

There should be harmony between landscaping and the architecture of the house. Use materials in keeping with the look, such as weathered bricks, ➤

Opposite:
Cottage-style planting of lavender, roses and wafts of daisies perfectly suits a thatched cottage, and to give interest year round include some structural shrubs, such as berberis and eleagnus





Above: Colours can be bright and cheerful – here Shasta daisies, sunflowers, salvias and coreopsis stand out against a rustic shed





Above: Arbours and pergolas can act as supports for climbers and also separate areas of the garden

Left: An urn planted with pelargoniums draws focus among the billowing *Alchemilla mollis*, *Nigella damascena*

flagstone, wood chips, gravel or stepping-stones, for paths and paving. Allow the paths to meander, avoiding straight lines or defined patterns, and soften them with billowing plants that spill over, blurring the edges – *Alchemilla mollis* or *erigeron* are ideal for path edges.

Consider enclosing a small cottage garden with traditional fencing, such as shabby chic painted timber pickets, woven willow or recycled timbers, to set off the effect and give order to the visual effervescence. Tall structures, including arbours, pergolas, obelisks or trellis, can be used as supports for roses, honeysuckle, wisteria, jasmine and other scented climbers, while traditional, weathered benches can help to divide the garden into rooms.

Finally, add a touch of whimsy with decorative items as focal points, such as antique watering cans, old tools, flower-clothed obelisks, or sundials – but use restraint so not to complicate the scene you are creating.

EXPERT TIPS

Nick Hamilton, president of the Cottage Garden Society and owner of Barnsdale Gardens, offers his expert advice

- Cottage gardens are all about the flowers, so fill your beds and borders. Many of the popular plants are easily propagated from seed, cuttings or division, so you can fill your garden cheaply.
- By using seed heads you will add aesthetic interest to the borders, with the added benefit that they will seed around.
- Keep plants under control, so that stronger growers don't swamp the smaller or slower-growing varieties. A discreetly placed piece of soft twine generally helps to keep the stronger ones under control.
- As a feature in a small garden, a mirror can be very effective.
- My favourite plants include: *Astrantia major* – grows anywhere, is good as a cut flower and is great in any border; *Erigeron* 'Profusion' – the name says it all, it provides a non-stop display of small daisy flowers; *Anemone* × *hybrida* 'Honorine Jobert' – enjoy a late season burst of colour from the tall, white flowers.

COTTAGE GARDENS TO VISIT

BARNSDALE GARDENS – a series of different styles of cottage gardens, including an artisan's and a gentleman's cottage garden, plus herb and kitchen gardens. Oakham, Rutland LE15 8AH. Tel: 01572 813200; barnsdalegardens.co.uk

FIELDCREST GARDEN – an established cottage garden, with a programme of courses and workshops. Birkenhead, Wirral CH3 0LT. Tel: 0151 334 8878; fieldcrestgarden.co.uk

ALFRISTON CLERGY HOUSE – an Arts and Crafts cottage garden style. Alfriston, East Sussex BN26 5TL. Nationaltrust.org.uk/alfriston-clergy-house

HIDCOTE MANOR GARDEN – early 20th-century garden that became a model for many others – a cottage garden on a glorified scale. Chipping Campden, Gloucestershire GL55 6LR. Nationaltrust.org.uk/hidcote

HELPFUL WEBSITES

THE COTTAGE GARDEN SOCIETY – thecottagegardensociety.org.uk

THE BRITISH PLANT NURSERY – britishplantnurseryguide.co.uk

JANE HARRIES GARDEN DESIGNS, cottage garden planting plans and designs – janeharriesgardens.co.uk ➤

12 ESSENTIAL COTTAGE GARDEN PLANTS

ROSES Scented old-fashioned English shrub and climbing roses are a classic choice. Plant among perennials, draped over arches and arbours, or against fences and walls. Plant bare-root plants from autumn to spring. Add slow-release fertiliser and mulch well to conserve water.

LAVENDER A beautifully ornamental herb with fragrant summer blooms, plant lavender in full sun and well-drained soil in spring. Trim after flowering, and prune in early spring. The grey foliage works well with other plants and lavender is a great choice to plant along paths.

FOXGLOVES A quintessential cottage garden favourite that produces spires of bell-shaped flowers in early summer. All kinds of bees love these flowers, and they were commonly grown in medieval gardens, despite being poisonous. They need light shade and protection from wind, in moist, well-drained soil.

AQUILEGIA This clump-forming herbaceous perennial is easy to grow, with clouds of dancing blooms in a wide range of colours in spring and early summer. Grow in part shade in well-drained soil. Aquilegias have an old-fashioned charm, combine beautifully with hardy geraniums and will freely self-seed.

DIANTHUS Fill your cottage garden with these deliciously scented blooms in spring and summer by choosing different varieties of these easy-care perennials and biennials. Use as edging plants, mixed in the cottage beds or in containers. Also known as pinks, they are drought tolerant and will thrive in sun or part sun in well-drained soil.

ALCHEMILLA MOLLIS An indispensable foliage ground cover for fringing paths, scrambling over slopes, underplanting roses or growing in gravel. The plants produce sprays of tiny flowers and have rounded, velvety soft olive-green leaves, which catch and hold water drops making them sparkle in the sun in early summer. Grows in any soil in sun or part shade. Trim back from late summer.

HOLLYHOCKS A traditional choice with spires of open, saucer-shaped flowers in July, which are irresistible to bees and butterflies. Hollyhocks need well-drained reasonably fertile soil in full sun and can reach heights of 2m. Keeping up with the watering will help prevent their main problem – rust. Cut them back after flowering.

DELPHINIUM These tall beauties need good drainage, protection from wind, regular watering and prefer a sunny spot. Summer blooms appear in true blues, mauves, purple, pink and white. Deadheading the first blooms will give a second flush, and taller varieties may need staking.

CAMPANULA You can select from a range of perennial varieties that flower from spring to autumn. Fill in among the other cottage plants and this is another favourite for beneficial insects such as bees and butterflies. Grow in sun to part shade. They are drought tolerant once established and self-seed readily.

PEONY Sumptuous, romantic summer flowers in pink, red or white with a lovely fragrance. These herbaceous perennials are pest resistant and drought tolerant once established. Grow in a sunny spot in deep, rich, well-drained soil. If they are happy they can keep blooming for 100 years.

GERANIUM Hardy geraniums are a brilliant filler plant or for fringing borders. Some varieties will keep flowering from June to October. They tolerate a wide range of soils, some prefer sun, others semi-shade, and are also drought tolerant. Combine with other herbaceous plants, roses and peonies.

DAISY These cheerful, simple, unpretentious summer to autumn flowers work well in cottage gardens. Grow in full sun in moderately rich, well-drained soil. They are disease and problem free, but give them a boost by feeding them just before flowering and deadhead spent blooms to keep the show going. 🌼

Top row, from left: Roses, lavender, foxgloves. Second row, from left: Aquilegia, dianthus, alchemilla mollis. Third row, from left: Hollyhocks, delphinium, campanula. Fourth row, from left: Peony, geranium, daisy





COMING UP ROSES

Discover how to create a romantic garden filled with the fragrant and graceful 'queen of flowers', with this expert guide

Words and photographs Leigh Clapp



Fringes of nepeta and frothy *Alchemilla mollis* complete the romantic scene in this garden of old roses, which includes 'Chapeau de Napoléon' and 'Comte de Chambord', grown at a height that the scents can be appreciated fully

There is no other flower that has received more attention from gardeners through the ages than the rose. An ancient bloom, roses date back some 35 million years, with most species native to Asia and smaller numbers from Europe, North America and Africa. Rose breeding in Europe started slowly from the 17th century, but it was not until the mid 1700s that Chinese garden roses were introduced and the great rose breeding rush began.

CREATING A ROSE GARDEN

Roses melded into a landscape look glorious but creating that scene needs careful planning. Begin by assessing your garden's micro-climates and conditions. Gather inspiration from garden visiting or books to decide how you would like to include roses – as part of a cottage style, in formal beds, draped over a wall, or in containers on a patio?

Decide colours and style of flowers to suit your taste, the style of your house and garden, the conditions and what effect you are aiming to create. Ideally try to see roses in bloom by visiting specialist nurseries and gardens during the flowering season. Whether you want to add some to your existing garden or start a rose garden from scratch, sketching out a diagram is helpful, as is deciding whether you want roses on their own or mixed with herbaceous plants or shrubs.

Roses will grow in most well-drained soils, but incorporate some well-rotted compost or manure before planting. The majority are fully hardy and prefer a sunny position, but some grow in shade, so they can be selected for different situations. The most economical way to grow roses is to plant bare-root plants from late autumn to early spring. Water well until established and feed often in spring, followed by mulching with organic matter to retain moisture and suppress weeds – but not close to the stems.

FORMAL ROSE GARDEN DESIGN

For a formal rose garden, design a series of beds and interesting paths; keep in mind that more beds mean more maintenance. Plan a geometric layout of square, rectangular or round beds, but keep the design simpler for smaller spaces. You could enclose your roses with low, neatly clipped hedges of box, myrtle or privet, which will hide the bare earth and lead the eye straight to the flowers.

Shrub and modern roses are ideal choices, as are standard roses. For a strictly formal garden design include roses alone, carefully positioned, planted quite close together and mulched, then trained and trimmed to conform to the design.

For a more casual touch, underplant roses with a controlled colour scheme of shallow-rooted annuals, perennials or tiny bulbs. If the plants chosen are lower than the rose bushes, their roots will not compete, and the formal look won't get lost amid a tangle of growth. A fringe of lavender as hedging or as a ribbon of colour inside the low

hedges also softens the rigidity and could be echoed by planting around a central focal point.

Topiary is another perfect companion and will provide structure when the roses aren't in flower. An elegant focal point of an urn, statuary or a water feature will complete the scene. Large pots of standard roses could punctuate each bed or be placed at regular intervals along the framework. To add an element of height, include climbers, arbours, pillars or tunnels, and position seating to enjoy the scene through summer.

INFORMAL SCHEMES

If you'd like to mix roses in borders and beds for an informal, romantic style, interplant with low shrubs, bulbs, climbers, annuals and perennials that like the same amount of sun and water.

Consider the colours, textures and shape combinations and ensure there is still good air circulation around the roses. The trick is to plan a succession of interest from flower and foliage to complement the roses. Avoid invasive or aggressive plants that will overcrowd the roses or compete with their roots.

The most romantic roses are ones with a wild habit and there is an array of cupped, fragrant old-fashioned-looking options, many of which are actually modern, such as the English roses. Rather than being tightly pruned, they are allowed to grow into larger, more natural shapes. Complete the look with ramblers, which flower once, or repeat-flowering climbers on supports or arbours.

CARE AND MAINTENANCE

A good mix of flowering shrubs, trees, perennials, annuals and bulbs alongside roses ensures that insect pests and rose diseases do not have as many host plants. Good companion plants include: peony, forget-me-nots, campanula, bearded iris, foxglove, erysimum, nepeta, *Alchemilla mollis*, eryngium, phlox, poppy, clarkia, dianthus, godetia, lavender, nicotiana, santolina, artemisia and ornamental grasses. Feverfew draws aphids, marigolds and chives repel pests and insects, and garlic protects from pests and helps prevent fungal diseases.

Roses are particularly prone to foliar diseases. Black spot and mildew lead to poor flowering and defoliation, but some roses have a resistance to this, such as gallicas, rugosas, ramblers, most modern floribundas and groundcover roses. You could also try underplanting with alliums or salvias as they act as a natural fungicide, keeping roses healthy.

Be vigilant with your maintenance. Tidy up any fallen leaves and keep your roses well fed and pruned to help them bloom to their best. Don't plant where roses have been before to prevent replant disease. If you have to spray there are organic options for aphids and thrips, but for some conditions you may need chemical sprays.

Deadhead flowers unless they produce rose hips, and for pruning advice refer to the RHS website (see below), which lists the steps for different types ➤

Opposite: This shady rose arbour provides a lovely spot to sit during the summer months. Use climbing roses to create an enchanting entrance, or adorn fences and walls

ROSE GROUPS

Roses derive from around 100 species, with thousands of cultivars now to choose from. The array on offer can get a little complicated and bewildering, so think of roses in three main groups:

SPECIES OR WILD ROSES – mostly single flowered that like to sprawl in a natural style, many have colourful hips in autumn; includes rugosa, glauca, moyesii and canina.

OLD GARDEN ROSES – dating from before the 1860s, these large graceful shrubs with mostly one flowering are richly fragrant; includes alba, gallica, damask, cabbage and moss roses.

MODERN ROSES – bred from the early 20th century, these repeat-flowering varieties include floribundas, hybrid teas, landscape, climbers, miniature and David Austin English roses, which combine flower and fragrance of old roses with wider colours and repeat flowering of the new.







Far left: The warm tones of a rustic brick path suit the informally planted rose garden billowing with a pretty mix of pink blooms. There are many uses for roses, including informal hedging with species or English, and landscape roses for ground cover



Above left: A ribbon of lavender follows the contours of massed *Rosa* 'Cottage Rose'

Far left: An intricate wrought-iron bench fits perfectly with the old rose charm of 'Fantin Latour' variety

Left: A lovely rose for a sunny cutting garden, *Floribunda Rosa* 'Southampton' reveals its blooms through summer into autumn

of roses. Ensure your secateurs are sharp so that they won't tear or harm the plant. As a general rule, prune established roses early February, climbing roses after flowering, and a midsummer tidy-up will help reinvigorate tired roses and encourage a second flush in autumn with repeat bloomers.

EXPERT TIPS

Michael Marriott, senior rosarian at David Austin Roses, offers tips on attaining a rose garden:

- Choose a good sunny position, although roses will do well if they get five or six hours of sun a day and are placed in an open position.
- Choose your varieties carefully, making sure they will be the right ultimate size for the location and are naturally resistant to disease.
- Roses are easy to look after; they need fertiliser in spring and summer, watering when it's dry and pruning in late winter.
- They look great alongside plants with small flowers, particularly those that are blue, purple or lilac. Choose plants that aren't too vigorous and keep them away from the base of the rose.
- 'Munstead Wood' is one of my favourite roses with very beautiful deep velvety crimson flowers and a wonderful fragrance, and another is 'Lady of Shalott' – the fragrant blooms are a rich apricot and it flowers very freely.

ROSE GARDENS TO VISIT

MOTTISFONT ABBEY – walled rose garden with one of the best old rose National Collections. Romsey, Hampshire SO51 0LP. Tel: 01794 340757; nationaltrust.org.uk/mottisfont

DAVID AUSTIN ROSES – display garden with the largest collection of David Austin roses, and plant centre. Albrighton, Wolverhampton WV7 3HB. Tel: 01902 376334; davidaustroroses.co.uk

COUGHTON COURT – rose labyrinth with 200 varieties. Alcester B49 5JA, Warwickshire. Tel: 01789 762435; coughtoncourt.co.uk

SISSINGHURST CASTLE – famous white garden with roses and herbaceous. Cranbrook, Kent TN17 2AB. Tel: 01580 710700; nationaltrust.org.uk/sissinghurst-castle

RHS GARDEN – modern roses in the Queen Mother's garden. Rosemoor, Torrington, Devon EX38 8PH. Tel: 0845 265 8072; rhs.org.uk/rosemoor

HELPFUL WEBSITES

RHS – find pruning and growing advice and lists of AGM roses; rhs.org.uk

BRITISH ROSES – britishroses.co.uk

HARKNESS ROSES – roses.co.uk

PETER BEALES ROSES – classicroses.co.uk ➤

12 RECOMMENDED ROSES

'AMERICAN PILLAR' – A very hardy, vigorous long-lived climbing rambler that is fast growing with glossy foliage. It blooms once spectacularly with dense sprays of flowers in midsummer, is best grown in full sun but tolerates some shade and is drought resistant. It has little fragrance, but it is a good choice for walls, arbours, or other structures – grow on its own or it will smother other climbers.

'DARCEY BUSSELL' – A David Austin English shrub rose which is repeat-flowering with a fruity fragrance. With compact growth it is lovely in the border, in a dedicated rose garden, for hedging or in containers. The richly crimson full blooms look lovely with mauve nepeta and lime green *Alchemilla mollis*.

'CONSTANCE SPRY' – This beautiful rose was the first of David Austin's and introduced the myrrh fragrance to the English roses. Flowers once in early summer and has strong growth. It can be grown as a climber with easy to train flexible canes, making it ideal for fences, walls, trellises and pergolas. It is best in full sun but tolerates some shade.

'JUST JOEY' – An elegant, continuously flowering hybrid tea with large fragrant blooms of ruffled petals. Disease resistant and with attractive mahogany-tinted foliage, its compact habit makes it ideal as a border plant, massed together and in containers, while the blooms make good cut flowers as well. Ensure that it gets plenty of sunlight.

'NEVADA' – Creamy white semi-double blooms, which open fully to show their deep yellow stamens, smother this shrub rose early in the season, and then it flowers intermittently through summer with showy red or purple fruits in autumn. Grows best in full sun and is tolerant of poor soils.

'PEACE' – The classic hybrid tea known for its sweetly scented pink-flushed yellow double blooms, from late spring to autumn. It is healthy, vigorous and makes excellent cut flowers. Grow with other hybrid teas or at the back of a border as it grows to about 1.2m.

'GRAHAM THOMAS' – A strong, vigorous David Austin English shrub rose with perfumed yellow cup-shaped blooms, which flowers almost continually through summer into autumn. Plant in groups to form a large bush in the border, or it is also available as a climbing rose. Voted the world's favourite rose.

'RAMBLING RECTOR' – An abundantly flowering rambler with a delicious fragrance from the sprays of small semi-double flowers that make a magnificent sight, then followed by masses of red hips in autumn. This is one for a large space, scrambling up a tree or on a strong support. The plant prefers full sun but will tolerate some shade.

'GERTRUDE JEKYLL' – Twice voted the nation's favourite rose for its abundant rich pink rosette blooms and old rose fragrance, it is repeat-flowering, very healthy and reliable. It grows in sun or part shade and looks pretty planted among billowing perennials.

'TWIST' – A patio climber with a blaze of small delicately scented flowers through the season and dark green foliage. It is ideal for a large container or small garden and has excellent disease resistance. Reaches a height of 1.5m. Grow in a sheltered, sunny spot. Underplanting suggestions include tiny white alyssum, viola and calibrachoa.

'ROSA MUNDI' – An old rose with a delicious old world fragrance that is a mutation of gallica, and because of its natural disease resistance it has lasted well through the centuries. It makes a stunning sight at the height of summer with its distinctive flowers and makes a pretty informal hedge.

'CORAL FLOWER CARPET' – One of the best ground cover ranges with clusters of repeat-flowering blooms. Disease resistant and easy to maintain – just shear back by one third in early spring. Drought and low-water tolerant. Once established they can provide up to two thousand flowers from late spring to autumn. 🌹

Top row, from left: American Pillar, Darcey Bussell, Constance Spry. Second row, from left: Just Joey, Nevada, Peace. Third row, from left: Graham Thomas, Rambling Rector, Gertrude Jekyll. Fourth row, from left: Twist, Rosa Mundi, Coral Flower Carpet





FROM PLOT TO PLATE

Join the 'grow your own' revolution with this guide to creating a kitchen garden brimming with wholesome vegetables, herbs, salad and fruit that you can pick fresh for the table

Words and photographs Leigh Clapp



A part from the advantage of cutting your food bills, there is nothing tastier or healthier than using the freshest ingredients for the kitchen table, straight from your own garden. The popularity of growing your own has led to sales of vegetable seeds overtaking those of flowers, and from a pot of herbs on the windowsill, tucking salads and vegetables in among the flowers beds, to setting aside a dedicated plot, there are many ways to create your own harvest.

HOW TO CREATE A KITCHEN GARDEN

Early spring is an ideal time to begin creating your plot, so start planning now. At first it may involve a little trial and error but, whether you have a small or large garden, you can add some edibles.

Decide on the size of the plot you would like to create and can manage. A large plot with room to grow everything will take a lot of work, both in preparation and also maintenance, whereas a tiny plot with dwarf varieties, containers, or produce mixed in among flowerbeds, are better options if your available time for gardening is limited.

POSITION

An open, sunny spot is preferable, ideally one that enjoys the morning sun, and around six to eight hours of direct sunlight daily. To grow quickly and well, vegetables need as much light as possible, so track the sun throughout the day to see where shadows fall. If you don't have these conditions, there are some crops that tolerate shade, such as cherries, blackberries, raspberries, rhubarb and blackcurrants. Wind protection is also important, so a permeable barrier, such as a picket fence, hedge or windbreak can filter its effect.

WHAT TO GROW

Grow what you love to eat, and as much as you need. Make a list of your favourite edibles, including herbs, and consider those that are more expensive to buy. Include different varieties of vegetables you enjoy, then look carefully at your space and climatic conditions and narrow your selection. Plan choices so that you have harvests throughout the seasons – from the first potato crops to brassicas through the winter months.

SOIL PREPARATION

Test the pH levels of your soil to see if it is more acid or alkaline – which can vary in different spots – and to help you select your crops. Soils are generally on a spectrum from clay to sand, but all will need the addition of organic matter to retain moisture and nutrients. Clay soil needs breaking up and takes longer to warm up so suits later crops, whereas light soils are good for early vegetables but will need large quantities of manure and compost to avoid water draining



away too rapidly. The ideal is loose, crumbly loam, which absorbs and holds water and nutrients, is well aerated and drains freely.

TYPE OF BEDS

Raised beds, filled with a loamy soil from a local garden centre, are ideal for growing small plots of vegetables, and the perfect choice if the soil in your garden is not good quality. They provide good drainage, increase soil temperature, prevent soil compaction, and the sides of the bed prevent soil washing away in heavy rain and act as a barrier to pests, such as snails and slugs, as well as pathway weeds.

You can buy ready-made raised beds, or make them yourself. Wooden planks or old railway sleepers are often used, brick or stone surrounds are long lasting, while woven willow looks pretty and rustic but will need renewing about every six years. Line timber beds with black polythene to keep the timber dry and increase its longevity.

LAYOUT OPTIONS

Every plot is different, so work out the best design for your space and needs. There are no rules; you can mix vegetables, fruit, herbs and flowers, including edible varieties, all jostling together in a tapestry of colours and shapes, in segregated rows or blocks, or as an ornamental potager, in a geometric pattern of your choice. Unless crops



Left: With deep raised beds, you can ensure the plants have the most nutritious soil to grow in, and can also sit on the sides while weeding and planting. Teepees can add height in the middle of beds, or line a path with apple arches to create an atmospheric allee. Use containers for interest, too

Previous page: An exuberant mix of produce and flowers, with beds intersected by brick and gravel paths to allow easy access. In this plot every inch is cultivated, with crops including chard, onions and corn, with companion planting of calendula, cleome, nigella and sweet peas for cutting flowers



need special protection, it can be helpful to mix the plantings, as a large area of a single crop attracts pests and the mix of different edibles and ornamentals confuses them. It is helpful to draw the design on paper first before marking out or planting.

Include access pathways, and keep in mind that beds need to be a size you can reach into easily for weeding, planting and harvesting. To keep slugs at bay it is advisable not to have long grass or dense flower borders directly next to the plot; instead a path makes it easier to spot and dispatch the pests.

Make best use of the vertical space, too. Grow climbers, such as peas, beans and cucumbers, up tripods and climbing frames, along with nasturtiums to attract blackfly away from crops, and sweet peas for added colour and scent. Include companion plants that attract beneficial insects, such as marigolds and daisies. Fruit trees are a wonderful addition, even in the tiniest space, as espaliers, cordons or step-overs.

SOWING AND PLANTING

Seeds are the lowest cost but if you don't have a greenhouse or propagator and want a more instant result, plug plants are a good option. A combination of plants and seeds may work best; you can pop seed trays inside on a

window sill, then pot on seedlings into the garden. Many vegetable seeds can be sown directly in situ once the soil warms up.

Plan a programme of small, successive sowings and plantings every couple of weeks for a yearlong harvest. Edge plots with contrasting plants, including herbs and flowers, which will mask bare spots as the season progresses. After harvesting, use fast fillers, such as chervil or cut-and-come-again salad greens. Many of the latter self-sow and can be moved easily to fill gaps when required. Fast-growing green manures are ideal: both mustard and phacelia are tough as well as beautiful in flower.

In February, you can start sowing choices such as broad beans, peas, carrots, onions, the first potatoes and salad crops under cloches. For great-value yielders you can't beat Swiss chard and perpetual spinach that will crop for a whole year and throughout winter. Salads can also be grown year round, and many of the most expensive to buy at the shops, such as rocket and baby leaves, are the easiest to grow. Other easy to grow edibles include tomatoes, potatoes, beetroot, courgettes, garlic, onions, squash, strawberries, chives and mint.

Vegetables, fruit and herbs can look beautiful, so be proud of your bounty. ➤

Above: Cut flowers grown next to the productive rows add scent and colour, and attract beneficial insects

12 KITCHEN GARDEN FAVOURITES

SALAD LEAVES – and lettuces are easy to grow from seed in the ground or containers, and give a high yield. Cut-and-come-again salads give a succession of leaves, from five to eight weeks after sowing – an economic alternative to expensive salad bags in shops and much fresher and tastier. They like fertile, moisture-retentive soil. Sow more every four to six weeks for a continuous supply.

TOMATOES – are easy to raise from seed from March on a warm windowsill with plenty of light, or buy plants from your garden centre in May. They need nutrient-dense soil. Sun-ripened tomatoes from your garden will beat the taste of any you can buy. ‘Bush’ tomatoes are the easiest as they don’t need to be staked or trained and grow happily outside in pots, hanging baskets or grow bags.

BEANS – are good yielders and use the vertical space rather than taking up ground level space. Easy to grow from seed, water them well and harvest regularly – the more you pick, the more the plant will produce. Broad beans can be sown direct into the ground in March or April, or French, borlotti and runner beans the end of May/early June, for a harvest 12–14 weeks later. An added bonus with scarlet runner beans is that the vibrant flowers are also edible.

CARROTS – Sow early carrots under cloches in February, or wait until March or April in the open. For sweet, small carrots, sow every few weeks from early spring to late summer for a successional harvest from June to November. They like light soil, with plenty of organic matter dug in with full sun for early varieties, or some shade for maincrop varieties. Carrots can also be grown in containers and raised beds; thin out the seedlings in the evenings, firming down the soil to help prevent carrot fly. Water when the weather is dry.

POTATOES – Plant chitted seed potatoes in the ground or containers – early varieties in late March and main crops in April, ready to harvest in 10 to 13 weeks. They grow best in fertile, slightly acidic loose soil, and need regular watering.

BEETROOT – is easy to grow from seed, in the ground or a pot. Sow directly into the soil in April to July, in medium to light, neutral to slightly alkaline soil that has not been recently manured. Keep well watered and weeded. Round varieties will be ready to harvest from 11 weeks. Golf ball size are tender and delicious and the leaves can be used as an alternative to spinach or in salads.

CHARD/SILVERBEET – Easy to grow, sow chard in spring, keep well watered and add liquid feed regularly. It often grows over a number of years as a perennial. Rainbow varieties add the wow factor whether in neat rows on the plot or mixed among garden flowers. Try ‘Bright Lights’, ‘Rainbow’ or ‘Ruby’. A great addition to stir-fries.

APPLES – Bare-root fruit trees can be planted from November to March. Self-fertile trees will produce fruit without the need of another tree to pollinate it. Soak roots before planting in a sheltered, sunny position, ideally in well-drained sandy loam soil. In a small space, train them against a wall or fence as an espalier. You can also buy espaliered trees in pots at garden centres throughout the year. Water well for the first few years and expect to harvest in a couple of years, depending on the variety. Even small gardens can have apples as step-overs, espaliered, on arches, or columns in containers.

GOOSEBERRIES – Easy to grow, there are many gooseberry varieties. Autumn is an ideal time to plant bare-rooted bushes, in a sunny sheltered spot. Prepare the soil by forking over and adding compost or rotted manure and fertiliser to the planting hole. Mulch and water well until they are established. Thin out in late May/early June, and use these first fruits for cooking. The second harvest, a few weeks later, will be sweeter. Net bushes or grow in a fruit cage.

CURRANTS – Bare-rooted white, red and black currants are available for planting between October and March. Easy to look after, once established they will remain productive for about 15 years. Plant in well-drained soil, with added well-rotted manure. A sunny, slightly sheltered spot is best, but they will grow in part shade. They will fruit from the second summer, but need training, pruning and feeding for best crops.

STRAWBERRIES – For a tasty and decorative treat, grow some strawberries in a hanging basket. Plant in April for a summer harvest. Place five or six plants in a basket, and water daily during the growing seasons. Feed from flowering to harvest time with a product high in potassium.

CALENDULA – These quick-growing hardy annuals work well en masse or to edge productive beds as a companion plant to attract beneficial insects. Easy to grow in most soils they will do their best in rich, loose soil in full sun. If grown organically, add the tangy flower petals to salads. ➤





EXPERT TIPS

Marylyn Abbott, gardening author and owner and creator of West Green House Garden in Hampshire, shares her potager preferences:

- A potager for me is a decorative design that should be functional, and mine is ever changing.
- To fill a planting space that is too large to maintain and to add structure to seasonal and rotating planting, make a pattern with a planting of santolina clipped as balls, rosemary or lavender.
- A crab apple is a tree for all seasons. In spring it gives blossom, in summer shade, and in autumn it bears small apples. Crab apples with yellow apples, like 'Golden Hornet' and scarlet 'John Downie', are the best varieties to make jelly from.
- If I had to choose one vegetable, it would be a climbing bean: they are easy to grow and give weeks of good vegetable right through the summer. I like to plant a combination of pod colours; green 'Monte Cristo', purple 'Carminat' and yellow 'Monte Gusto'.

KITCHEN GARDENS TO VISIT

WEST GREEN HOUSE GARDENS – Imaginative, ever-changing creative potager displays. Near Hartley Wintney, Hook, Hampshire RG27 8JB. Tel: 01252 844611; westgreenhouse.co.uk

WEST DEAN GARDENS – Restored walled Victorian kitchen garden and glasshouses, with heritage and new vegetable varieties. West Dean, West Sussex PO18 0QZ. Tel: 01243 818279; westdean.org.uk

PASHLEY MANOR GARDENS – Decorative home kitchen garden. Ticehurst, East Sussex TN5 7HE. Tel: 01580 200888; pashleymanorgardens.com

ATTINGHAM PARK – Late-18th-century kitchen garden, two acres of glasshouses and Georgian bee house. Atcham, Shropshire SY4 4TP. Tel: 01743 708123; nationaltrust.org.uk/attingham-park

AUDLEY END HOUSE & GARDENS – Organic walled kitchen garden, with over 120 apple and 60 tomato varieties. Saffron Walden, Essex CB11 4JF. Tel: 01799 522842; english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/audley-end-house-and-gardens 📍

Above: Clipped buxus spheres add a touch of formality at the edge of this vegetable bed, in which young plants are protected from scavengers by mesh cloches

Opposite: Make a feature of your plot and position a seat to look over it



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tkmaxx.com
Topps Tiles 0800 783 6262
toppstiles.co.uk

U UK Bathroom Warehouse
020 8090 3449
ukbathroomwarehouse.com

V Vanessa Arbuthnott
01285 831437
vanessaarbuthnott.co.uk
Veeton Fleece 01483 575758
veetonfleece.com
Victorian Dreams 01428 717000
victorian-dreams.co.uk
Victorian Plumbing 0345 862
2878 victorianplumbing.co.uk
Vintage Living 01803 863999

W The White Robin
thewhiterobin.co.uk
William Morris 0844 543 9500
william-morris.co.uk
Woodchester Cabinet Makers
01453 835580
woodchestercabinetmakers.co.uk

Z Zoffany 0844 543 4600
zoffany.com